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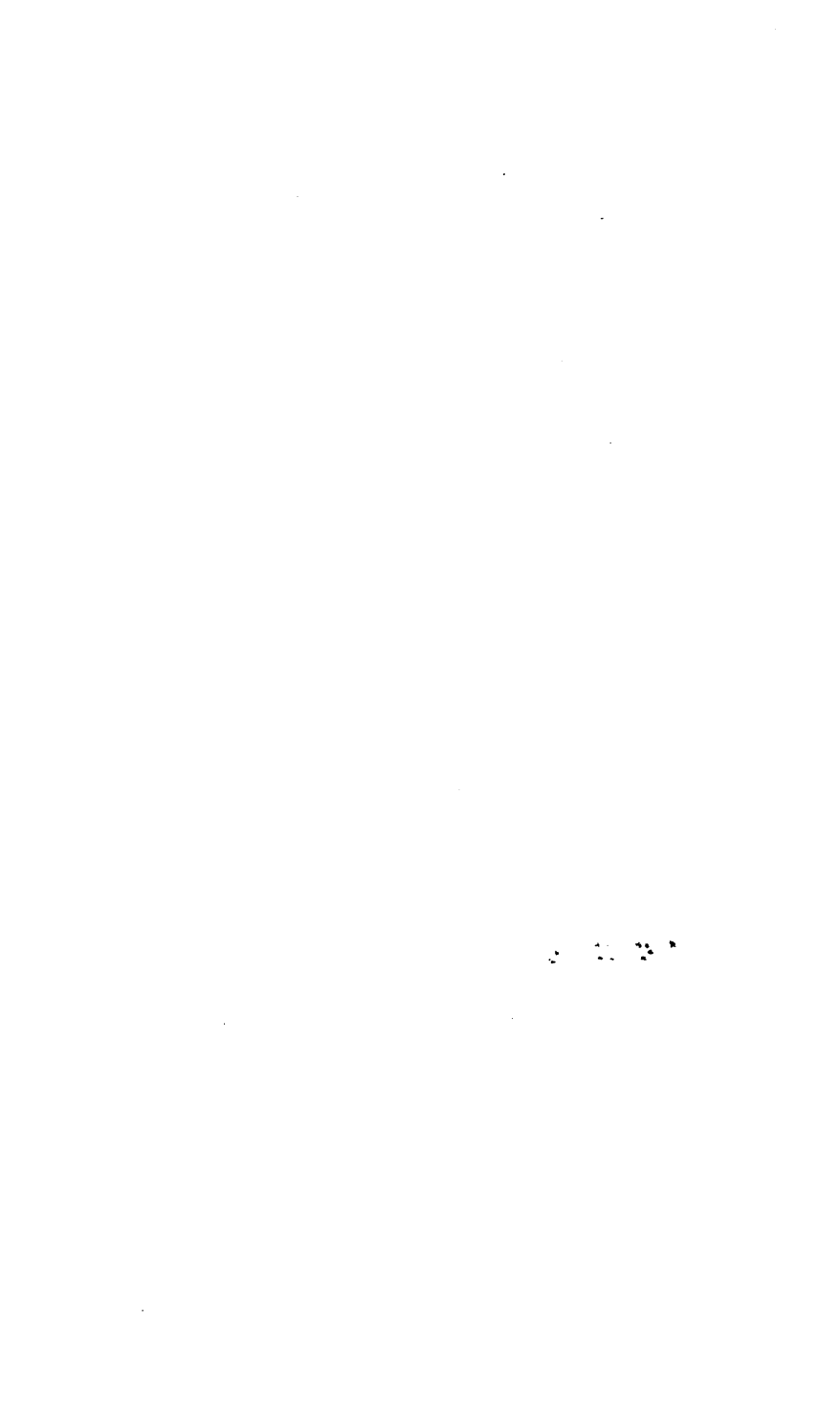
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By REV. P. B. POWER.

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Pivot Words of Scripture.

BY THE

REV. PHILIP BENNETT POWER, M.A.,

AUTHOR OF "I WILLS" OF THE PSALMS, "I WILLS" OF CHRIST, &C.

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PREFACE.

THE following pages have been, for the most part, written during the sunnier hours of protracted illness. They are dedicated to the physician to whom, under Providence, the author owes it, that the sunny hours have been so many, and the twilight ones so few. He would have these pages considered as the exercise of such ministry as is still permitted to him; and it may be, in the wonderful arrangements of God, that some one, who might have been unreached by the ministry of the mouth, may be blessed by the ministry of the pen.

The various chapters have no direct connection with each other; each subject is, so far as it has been treated of, intended to be complete in itself. The illustrations are derived from such biographies as the author had by him; they will not be the less acceptable to the reader because they come, for the most part, from familiar sources; they have been supplied, principally, by the lives of Newton, Simeon, Daniel Wilson, Lady Maxwell, Krause, Madam Guyon, Henry Martyn, Toplady, and Rauschenbusch, the latter an eminent minister of the so-called Pietists in Germany. The history of the "Rough-House" and the work of Falk and Immanuel Wichern have also

furnished examples illustrative of some of the points under consideration.

A word must be added with reference to the name of the book. It is not easy to find, for a work of this character, a title which will not interfere with some one already in use, and which will at once avoid what is common-place, and give a fair index to the contents of the book. The title, "Pivot Words of Scripture," seems to answer these requirements. A pivot being a small point on which something else turns, it seemed to be very descriptive of those little words of Holy Scripture upon which turns the actual interpretation of a passage, as in the case of "For," in Mark vi. 52, or by which other teachings of importance are brought before our notice. Especial reference may be made to teachings by contrast, of which Holy Scripture is so full; these revolve, for the most part, on the little words "Though" and "Yet"; and to those small words we are indebted for some of the most powerful teachings of God's word, whether they relate to his mercy or his wrath. In a work of this size, there has been space to treat of but a few of the deeply important little words of Holy Scripture; the author is very conscious how much more might be said even on those few. He is well aware that he could not make his chapters exhaustive; he prays that God's Spirit will make them suggestive, and that great blessing may rest upon the time spent upon little words.

WEST HEATH HOUSE,

ABBAY WOOD, KENT,

OCTOBER, 1865.

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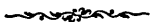
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PIVOT WORDS OF SCRIPTURE.



I.

Then.

“ Then the devil leaveth Him ; and behold, angels came and ministered unto Him.” — MATT. IV. 11.

THE lives of great men are full of interest for those who come after them. Much of the charm of history consists in matters of detail concerning them ; and personal incidents are always welcome, even to such as are studying the remote causes of those great revolutions, or those gradual changes, by which men and manners become altered, and dynasties and kingdoms rise and fall.

We need not go far to find the reason of this. Man will always take more interest in his fellow-man than in any abstract principles or problems, because of the common humanity that he shares with him. The sameness of capacity for pleasure and pain ; the oneness of hopes and fears, of joys and sorrows, which bind the race together, will, in the main, give them more interest in each other than in any object beside.

The history which at once charms and teaches us most is that in which philosophy and incident mingle together, and illustrate each other.

Now, the greatest of all histories, — that of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, — read by its own light, and supplementally by the light of St. Paul's epistles, fulfils the highest requirements of which we have been speaking. His is the history of an individual, no doubt; but it is also the history of the condition of man, of conflicts, of the warfare of mighty kingdoms, of the strugglings of great antagonistic principles, in which the most momentous human interests are at stake. But in one point this history differs from all others; viz., in the fact that everything is bound up in a solitary individual. Everything depends upon who and what he is; we cannot understand him, unless we understand his work; and, conversely, we cannot understand his work, unless we understand himself.

Hence the deep importance of each individual act of Christ, and of the reasons of that act. No man liveth to himself; and if this be true of ordinary men in their little circles, how much more so of the great representative man, Christ Jesus, — the second Adam, — who in his bare existence, and in every word he spake, and deed he did, reaches forth his influence to the wide circle of the whole human race.

The scene in the temptation appears pre-eminently a matter of personal history; there are but two actors in it, — the Lord Jesus himself and the Evil One, — for it is not until the devil leaveth him, that angels come and minister unto him. But why was Jesus

tempted? The answer to that question at once invests the scene with the utmost interest for us. He was tempted as a necessary part of the carrying out of God's plan for our salvation; and thus every particular of that temptation assumes an aspect of immense personal importance to us. It becomes a part of the history of the spiritual kingdom to which we belong; yea, of the spiritual family with which we are connected; yea, even of our own spiritual, personal life; for in what do we stand, save in his blood-shedding, to which all this obedience and victory was preliminary and essential. Christ speaking, journeying, eating, praying, being tempted; Christ, in every phase and act of his life, is in connection with us; if we fail in seeing wherein the interest of all this lies, the fault is not in him, but us.

In the matter of Christ's temptation, we can plainly see a twofold reference to ourselves; it presents him to us in a twofold character; first, as the worker-out of our salvation; and, secondly, as a teacher, — a teacher come from God, and gifted, doubtless, with divine lore; but at the same time a teacher with acquired human experience; for it was needful for his Church that Jesus should be perfect, not only in human nature, but in the experience which belonged to that nature also.

It would have been impossible for Jesus to work out our salvation according to God's plan, had he not approved himself obedient; and he could not have proved himself obedient if he had not been tempted. Innumerable objections to his suitability as a Saviour might have been urged from various

quarters. Satan might have said, "He is no better than his fellows; the only reason that he did not fall is, that he was not tried." Man might have urged that God had no ideal of perfect obedience at all, for that he did not try whether it would be yielded to him by his own Son, when in the flesh; and therefore disobedience cannot be such fearful sin as some suppose; while there would not be wanting some who said that he died for his own sinfulness, if not for his own sin. Jesus was proved as a pure victim, before he was approved as an acceptable sacrifice; and his obedience had everything to do with this.

He, the second Adam, must be tempted, even as was the first Adam; and he was "tempted in all points, like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. iv. 15.)

And while this occupies an important place in what we might call the hard working out of our salvation, it is of great value as regards the stability and comfort of the Lord's people. They have to repose in many troubles upon the obedience of Christ. He not only died for them, but he was obedient for them. When their disobedience is brought home to them by their conscience, they think on his obedience; and that it is theirs; that it is accepted for them by the Father. If they tremble about their holding out to the end, they remember that he held out to the end, and that their life reposes in him. The fact of Jesus being a proved man is one of immense importance to the saints. How this binds us to Christ, and to him alone! None could have done as he did; therefore none can stand to us in the relationship that he does, — He is alone in life, alone in death.

Look, also, at Jesus, in his office of a teacher. Temptation enters into the character of Christ in this capacity. Our Lord was to have a close relationship with man, as long as the world lasted ; and that relationship was to be a very complicated one. It required great knowledge and intense feeling ; he was to be connected with poor, erring, and imperfect beings, who would continually need his sympathy, his intercession, his presence. Can we not see immediately, how he could do everything for them ; and teach them out of the fulness of his own experience ?

It is impossible for us seriously to consider the life of Jesus, without our being taught thereby. Have we to resist ? then we see how he ennobles resistance ; have we to obey ? then we see how glorious obedience is ; for it was the daily path trodden by One that was the Son of God ; have we to suffer ? then we become nerved and braced for it, as we read that he was a man of suffering and acquainted with grief ; have we to go through temptation ? then he teaches us how to go through it, even as he went himself.

The scene, then, before us must now be contemplated with special reference to ourselves ; and the object of these pages is to draw from what we read here something that will be of use to us in our own daily temptations and trials.

The teaching of this short passage is twofold, ranging itself under two distinct heads : —

I. THE DEVIL LEAVING CHRIST.

II. THE ANGELS MINISTERING TO HIM.

For forty days was our blessed Lord tempted by this evil spirit; and now that he leaves him, our attention is drawn to this blessed truth; namely, that *there is an end to protracted temptation.*

The temptations of many of God's people are, even as is often the case with their bodily sufferings, very protracted. They are not limited to mere passing thoughts of evil, to a fiery blast which sweeps against them, and then passes on, or to a chill of frost, which numbs them for a moment, and then yields to sunshine again; they are sometimes continued, with or without intermission, as the case may be, for months, and, in some instances, for years, cropping up from time to time, even to the end of life itself.

"As life advances," says Daniel Wilson, late Bishop of Calcutta, in his diary, "the deceit and desperate wickedness of the human heart are more and more apparent. I find the vagrancy of the fancy, the corrupt pictures on the tablet of the memory, the old scenes of evil crowding upon the soul, amongst my sorest conflicts. In truth, I cannot enter upon the subject. The chambers of imagery, one with the other, are so mysterious; I can only open my case to the all-seeing One, and beseech him to behold me in the person and work of his only begotten Son; to hide me in his wounds, to plunge me in the fountain of his blood; and to stamp upon me, by his renovating Spirit, the blessed image of his own holiness, more and more."

Again we find the same complaint some years after. "A little leisure fills me with confusion and

shame, as I meditate on my own heart. Every evil is ready to rise up. The fancy, memory, imagination, are Satan's workshop in advanced life. O Lord! cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit. Grant me that purity of heart which prepares for seeing thee."

Again, in a letter, we meet with the same trouble: "Evil thoughts are amongst the assaults which Satan makes, I find, upon old age. Our collect for the second Sunday in Lent, and at the commencement of the communion service, suit well my mind. So, also, the words of the Psalmist: 'I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love.'" If our temptations were momentary, our sufferings from them would be far less than they are; but they continue with us so persistently, in some instances, that they seem to aim at conquering us by the process of wearing out.

Now, it was necessary that our Lord should experience this protracted temptation on behalf of his people, that we, in our long, dark, weary times, should be able to think of his long, dark, weary time; and that we should hear his voice, when he says, "All that thou art suffering, I suffered also; I know thy trial, for so I was tried myself." We are often deeply depressed, when we see that the temptations of former years are our temptations still; we think, "If Satan sees that he is distasteful to us, that surely ought to be a help to drive him away. Can it be that he sees, underlying all my efforts after holiness, a real predisposition towards this sin?"

Whether there be a natural predisposition towards yielding to this special temptation or not, is not our

present inquiry. What we are now to think of is the fact that protracted temptation was the lot of Christ, and the disciple is not above his Master. We may make this protraction a subject of special communication with our Lord; we may say, "Teach me how to bear it; teach me how to meet it in its ever-varying phases; give me the cordials which are necessary for each period and each form of it; give to me out of thine own knowledge." We may be sure that this temptation-suffering of Christ will not be in vain; if he endured it for us, we shall get the benefit of it; provided only we seek to enter into it, and make it practically bear upon our own sad need. Dear reader, think of this, when you feel oppressed at the length of any of your trials. Your trial may meet you in worldly things as well as in spiritual; but forasmuch as the spiritual element enters into the worldly, and you may be tempted to distrust, impatience, or wrong-doing, either to escape from an evil, or to acquire a good, be assured that even in the protracted worldly trial Jesus meets you, and says, "I was tempted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness; and that season of my trial had an end; then the devil left me."

There are some, perhaps, whose almost only form of trial is mental, subtle, spiritual; but such are comparatively few. To most in this world of hard realities, the temptation comes through some outward things. And, be it observed, the temptation, as a spiritual one, is none the less subtle on that account; enter, then, dear reader, into the protraction of the sufferings of your Lord in connection with your own; and

if you have long periods of illness, long periods of depression, or loss, or provocation, or aught else that tries your trust in God, or your love of him, remember the temptation of your Lord; hear him cheer you by the story of his trial, and how, at last, the devil left him.

The protraction of the temptation of our Lord suggests to us another thought also, of great importance to many troubled minds; it is this: *Protracted temptation is not, of necessity, any sign of short-coming in sanctification.* Temptation is no sign of actual evil. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am *well pleased*;" and scarcely are the words uttered, when the temptation of this beloved one begins. "Himself suffered, being tempted," says the apostle (Heb. ii. 18); and "blessed," says St. James (i. 12), "is the man that endureth temptation."

It is, indeed, a great mistake to suppose that we must be especially unholy because we are especially tempted; and it is a further mistake to think that our sanctification cannot be advancing because we are so constantly having the presence of evil with us, in the form of satanic temptation. The fact is, that temptation is one of the great instrumentalities at work in moulding the Christian's character. It is, of course, not so designed by Satan; but it is so overruled by God. And this instrumentality has its slow and gradual, as well as its quick, process; the solid, weighty Christian is very often built up in the midst of long temptation.

We must not, then, write bitter things against ourselves because we feel day succeeding day in trial

from any one temptation ; we may feel no more than that we are resisting ; but resistance in many cases is victory. Our Lord's victory, in the case before us, was the victory of resistance ; ours may be the same. Our sanctification may go on side by side with our temptation ; yea, more than this, it may be interwoven with it. These forty days are the longest specific period of our Lord's life of which we have any account, after he entered on his work ; and surely, the record that it was spent in temptation and trial is not without significance for us.

It is indeed a most comforting thought to the believer that temptation, the most protracted, has an end. An endless trial is indeed a crushing one ; the poor heart withers and dies, when it sees no termination to suspense, sorrow, or pain. But let us remember that it is one thing to believe that our long trial must have an end, and another, to see when that end will come, or by what means it is to be brought about. Neither of these may be vouchsafed to us by God. It may be that our ignorance on these two points is intended by him to form a part of the trial of our faith. Of one thing, however, we may be sure, — that we shall not be tempted or tried in any way above what we are able to bear. (1 Cor. x. 13.) The Refiner of silver sits beside the fire, and watches the crucible, and remembers how precious is the metal he is purifying there.

Let us take to ourselves all the comfort of the finality of trial ; each moment spent in it is a moment nearer its end, — “ this much is suffered ; ” well, then, there is so much less to be suffered. Our

trials, if we be the Lord's, are not destined, like those lost in the land of woe, to be eternal; those things concerning us have an end. We should ever keep this end in view; our Lord doubtless did so in this his great trial in the wilderness. He felt its length; but he looked to its end. Only let us await God's ending of it, and not try to hasten on, against evident marks of his will, an ending of our own. It is God only who can dig out the roots of trial; we may cut them down, in many instances, no doubt; but how often is it only to sprout up afresh.

And, once more; as we see an end put to this protracted temptation, is it not forcibly impressed upon us that *the evil one, terrible as he is, is only a limited being*? This is a most important consideration for the people of God. The wicked one has much power, but it is a bounded power, — bounded by the goodness of God, who will not allow his people to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear; by his wisdom, which knows the exact proportion between the strength of the tempter and the tempted; by his power, which, overruling all, restrains the power of Satan, and terminates it when the proper time has come. This power of Satan, though bounded at all times, is not always of necessity confined within the same limits. We see this in the case of Job. The limit was stricter in the first portion of his trial than in the second. "And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not thine hand." Manifold were the trials which came on Job from that amount of permission; but there were others yet to come. The

permission was extended. "Skin for skin," said Satan, "yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life; but put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand, but save his life." In this last trial, the devil would no doubt gladly have made an end of Job. Foiled in his desire to make him curse God, he would have wreaked his vengeance upon him; but he was restrained by the strict limit put upon him by the Most High.

The evil one is under the restraint of a "But," with reference to all the people of God; he could go so far, and no farther, with Job, — so far, and no farther, with Jesus, — he can go so far, and no farther, with us. God sits above the water floods; when the enemy comes in like a flood, then the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him. (Isa. lix. 19.) "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer," says Jesus to the angel of the church of Smyrna; "behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation *ten days*; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. ii. 10.)

Whenever, then, we are evidently about to enter upon trial, or, still more, when we have been long in it, let us set distinctly before our minds this idea of the limitation to satanic power. We shall thus put ourselves more distinctly into the hands of our heavenly Father. We shall feel that he is overruling all; and reposing upon him in the simplicity of living faith, we shall be at peace.

We now turn to another thought, connected with Satan's leaving our Lord ; it is this ; *he did not leave until he had finished.* St. Luke tells us (iv. 13) "when the devil had ended *all* the temptation, he departed from him for a season."

This temptation was uninterrupted. Wave followed wave in quick and steady succession, until the time came when Satan was to depart from him for a season. The Father was all the while looking on at this trial of his beloved Son ; and the angels were waiting, it may be, with a holy impatience to succor him ; but neither the Father nor the angels appear upon the scene ; no one breaks in upon the solitude of this hand-to-hand conflict, this great duel between these two mighty chiefs, — the Prince of light and the prince of darkness, the Prince of life and the prince of death.

We, who are soldiers of Christ, and engaged in the same warfare, and with the same enemy as his, are called from time to time to undergo what we may designate as a season of uninterrupted temptation. It may be that we think it hard that we should not have breakings in upon us of light and heavenly messengers of strength and peace ; as though we were the best judges of our own endurance, we think, "If I be not succored, I shall fall ;" but on such occasions we must fall back upon this scene, and, in heart, stand with Jesus ; and we shall certainly be carried through.

At such times we are, in truth, alone ; and yet not alone, inasmuch as we have no special help from above ; we are not alone, inasmuch as we take up our

position with Christ in the wilderness ; we go through the scene of trial as with him. He truly was alone, that we should not be alone, and that with him we may be enabled to go through temptations in which Satan, and Satan alone, should be awfully presented to our view.

And here we see that Christ's was a full, and not a partial, victory. The angels did not come until the ground was clear, and Satan gone. The temptation was undoubtedly meant to exercise an immense influence on Christ's after ministry, and his relation to satanic powers ; and Satan must be made to know with whom he had to fight. It has been well observed by Olshausen that "the temptation was a decisive event, giving direction to all the after life ; and that as Adam's after sin was an unfolding of original sin, so Christ's after victories were an unfolding of this victory."

It may be that we feel discouraged as we contemplate the completeness of this initial victory of Christ. Our hearts, in deep consciousness, of their own weakness, sink at the thought of such conflict ; and Satan, whose pride, great as it is, will stoop low enough when he has an object in view, will say, "It is true ; I was thoroughly defeated by your Lord in a long, uninterrupted temptation ; but you and he are very different ; where I failed with him, I shall succeed with you."

Never, dear reader, let us forget on such occasions that we stand in Christ ; his victory shall be reckoned to us as our victory ; in this thought only can we have any peace. But we must not on this account refuse

to look at our own victory, such as it is, over Satan ; nor at what is involved therein. Christ, here, in full perfection, stepped forth as the champion of his Father, and of his eternal truth, and of the consequences flowing from that truth, and overcame. We, in our measure, do the like, when, taking our stand in Christ, we boldly declare that we take God for our Father and our portion, and his will as our law and guide. We cannot take the decided step, without joining issue with the devil. True! our victory is but partial ; we are weak, where the Holy One is strong ; but we stand in his strength, and God, looking at our sincerity, counts us victorious ; we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

Even amid many failings on our part, the question may become wholly settled that we are the Lord's ; and out of this may flow forth consequences of vast importance to us. Jesus, we may be sure, felt the power of this great victory living within him in his after conflicts with the devil ; we may do the same. If we can say to Satan, "I have thoroughly given myself to God, I have thoroughly taken him to be my Father," then our after victories will be only the unfoldings of that great victory, wherein it was decided whose soldier and servant we should be unto our lives' end. Oh, let every reader understand whether he has wholly given himself to the Lord or not. If he has, then out of that gift — the making of which is the greatest victory which man can gain — there will unfold, in after life, continual victories, won also on very varied fields. The truth that he is

God's will meet him everywhere; "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" will be his watchword in many a spiritual campaign; that mighty truth, "I am his," will be continually evolving strength; and around it, in concentric circles, will be described triumph after triumph, yea, and joy after joy. "My meat and drink," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him that sent me." The very soul will be nourished out of this central truth, that we are God's. The truthfulness of Christ's first conflict followed him throughout his career; the truthfulness of ours will do the same.

And do we not see here that *we cannot hurry through temptations at our will?* Had we matters just as we would wish them to be, no doubt we should get rid of temptation very quickly. We do not will to be tempted; perhaps the temptation is one utterly abhorrent to us; and, therefore, as distressing to us as any foreign body would be, that obtruded itself into so delicate an organ as the eye; or perhaps it is congenial to our poor, fallen nature; and, therefore, all the more distressing because we have to contend with ourselves as well as with it; but whichever be the case, with temptation is trial; and we would be rid of it as quickly as possible.

There are reasons why temptation cannot thus be hurried through. In all temptations there is discipline and educational power, more or less; and a portion of this discipline and educational power consists in their length. That length forms a habit in our minds; it hardens us against the evil; it puts us into a state of confirmation against it; it unfolds the

energies of our soul against the unfoldings of its energies of evil, and gives us the practice which is so essential in the spiritual life, in whatever aspect we view that life, whether as warfare or education. There are, no doubt, certain temptations, the very nature of which is, that they should be short and sharp; they leap on us with a spring, and when resisted, they vanish in a moment. But it would not suit Satan's purpose to depend only upon these; he must try the force of time as well as anything else; and, as he does so, he, against his will, schools the believer for higher victories on earth, and for meetness for his inheritance in heaven.

And there is another reason, also, why temptation cannot be hurried through. The matter is not one solely of our will. The devil's will is brought to bear on us. He is now allowed to develop his evil will. This is his hour, and the power of darkness. It is God's will that man should be holy; it is the devil's will that he should not. The antagonism of the evil one to the Holy One must be manifested and worked out in man; and Satan's will must be allowed to develop itself, or this could not be done.

Let us remember this as we find temptations long continuing. Their abiding upon us may be because of some peculiar tendency to evil in us, which is destined thus to be ground down, or burned out; or it may be simply because of the strife which is being carried on in the person of man. In either case, it will be our wisdom to remember that they may be destined to abide with us for some time, and that if they do, we are in this respect only sharers with our Lord.

The need of patience to start with is also strongly suggested to our minds. Jesus was the very pattern of patience ; in this spirit he entered upon his ministry, and in this he closed it. It was the virtue which, of all others, seems to us to have been the most tried, both by his enemies and friends. Indeed, two of the temptations recorded here, if not all three, dealt indirectly at least with this virtue. We know how pressing are the claims of hunger, — how eagerly a hungry man attempts to get food ; how, as the old proverb has it, “ hunger will break through stone walls ; ” how impatient, how irritable a man is until his want is supplied ; but Jesus would not command the stones to be made bread ; he patiently waited the Father’s time. We know how impatient man is when his personal claims are not acknowledged, especially when those claims are well founded and just ; but Jesus would not cast himself down amid the people to be acknowledged as Son of God either by the devil or by them. A time would come, when, descending from a far greater height, even from the right hand of the throne of God, with all his holy angels with him, the world and the prince of this world must acknowledge him. He could wait for that time, and not pluck the fruits of the kingdom until they were ripe. The temptation to take all the kingdoms of the earth at the price of satanic worship fell harmlessly upon him ; in due season they would become his as his birthright ; and the day of his heirship had not yet come.

It was in this spirit of patience that our Lord entered upon and went through this temptation in the

wilderness. He had verily need of patience with which to start; and sweetly and calmly it bore him through. Wonderful, indeed, are the achievements of patience in conflict such as this. It will do more than many apparently more brilliant qualifications; even the most brilliant will derive fresh lustre from it. With patience comes perseverance and endurance and the non-expectation of ease, and the subjection of the will to protraction of trial, and consequently the commencement of the struggle with great advantage. If we enter upon our trial time with a spirit of patience, we are far more likely to go well through it than if we be fretful and impatient, and consequently unsteady. When we are impatient, we fancy ourselves ill used; we listen to insinuations against God, either from within or without; in a word, we are likely to get wrong every way. Much calmness of mind and judgment is required during many trials; and impatience will prevent this, and consequently deprive us of our spiritual steadiness. Let us reflect, as we enter upon any trial, that we do not know how long it may last. Trials have many strange windings and turnings, sometimes terminating almost suddenly, but sometimes, also, drawing out their road for many a weary mile, when we thought they were near an end. How shall we ever go properly through these trials if we fancy that they ought every moment, or at the expiration of certain fixed times which we have appointed them, to come to a close? We must leave the time of the end to God's appointment; we must see to it that we, by his grace, be prepared patiently to enter upon our al-

lotted path. This *is* hard, — we know, perhaps, its hardness by past short-comings; but God's grace is all-sufficient. We may be sure we shall be made partakers of the patience of the Captain of our salvation, if only we steadily place him before us and seek for it. There are sometimes life-long trials, and with them temptations from loss of property, of friends, of health, from alienations, misunderstandings, depressions; in these there is a mingling of the temporal and the spiritual; and sometimes there are life-long trials in matters purely spiritual. Let us pray for patience, — for patience as a spiritual *power* in our conflict, — for patience in all things great and small, and we shall thus be imitators of Christ in our trial time.

And before this portion of our subject is left,* it will be well to observe, especially with regard to this latter form of temptation, namely, the purely spirit-

*How are we both humbled and taught by such an entry as we find in Henry Martyn's journal! "June 29th. — My ague and fever returned, with such a headache that I was almost frantic. Again and again I said to myself, 'Let patience have her perfect work,' and kept pleading the promises, 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee,' etc.; and the Lord did not withhold his presence. I endeavored to repel all the disordered thoughts that the fever occasioned, and to keep in mind that all was friendly, a friendly Lord presiding, and nothing exercising me but what would show itself friendly." And how is our impatience in little things — in, for example, our not getting our letters exactly when we are expecting them — rebuked by this touching entry in his journal while he was at Shiraz, passing "a dreary season of long seclusion from Christian society, surrounded by those who were immersed in all wickedness." "Feb. 3. — A packet arrived from India, without a single letter for me. It was some disappointment to me; but let me be satisfied with my God; and if I cannot have the comfort of hearing from my friends, let me return with thankfulness to his Word, which is a treasure of which none envy me the possession, and where I can find what will more than compensate for the loss of earthly enjoyments. Resignation to the will of God is a lesson which I must learn, and which I trust he is teaching me."

ual, that we, like Jesus, may be compelled to bear it alone.

There are many trials in which we have the advantage of the advice and consolation of friendship ; but there are unquestionably some in which we have to suffer alone. There are persons of an isolated, solitary nature, who shrink from any companionship in their woes, and they, of course, will be solitary under any circumstances ; but there are others, who, with a genial and confiding nature, still have a bitterness which their own heart knoweth, and wherewith a stranger intermeddleth not. There are temptations and thoughts which cannot even be spoken of. We would say to all who are suffering under such trial, remember the solitude of Jesus in the wilderness, fall back upon his loneliness, make that lone Man your friend, converse with him upon your trial, and upon the fact of your being obliged to keep it to yourself. The natural tendency of a terrible secret is to eat into the mind. Do not permit your mind to be corroded and weakened, and perhaps unhinged by keeping your trial to yourself ; go to Christ with it ; tell him that you know how he by his loneliness understands all about you in your loneliness ; and you will find immense relief. A load will be rolled off your mind ; the stagnant water of the soul will be stirred ; you will feel that there is One who understands you ; and you will go your way, your trial, it may be, not removed, but you yourself feeling that you have One with you who understands both you and it ; and thus you will be both happier and safer until the time has

come for you when the devil must depart, and the advent of heavenly consolation begin.

We would now joyfully turn to the advent of heavenly consolation to our Lord ; but there are yet a few points which we must consider with reference to the continuance of this satanic temptation. It is well to be full upon this subject, because we so often find both readers and hearers saying, " Ah ! you have left out my case ;" and when we come to consider the consolation of the ministering angels, we would not have any tried reader say, " Ah ! my trial has not been touched on ; the heavenly visitors are not for me."

Let us observe, then, further, that *Satan did not leave our Lord until he had tried various temptations.*

The point which we are now to think of is the variety of these temptations. They were uninterrupted in their durations ; they were various as regards their kind. Here, as in the other points of our Lord's temptation, his experience was on behalf of his people. Satan must have no resources against the people of God, of which their Saviour has not taken cognizance. The evil one was allowed to try the hardness of this mighty warrior all around and in every piece, to see if there were any vulnerable point, or if he had any weapon by which it could be pierced.

Now it was needful that our Lord should experience the *variety* of satanic temptation on our behalf. The variety of Satan's resources forms one great element of his strength. He has temptations which are suitable to every cast of mind, and to every circum-

stance of our life ; and he can shift those temptations with amazing dexterity and speed.

Our Lord succors us out of his own experience ; and it is needful that we, when we find ourselves attacked from different quarters and with different weapons, should be able to appeal to him. Our Lord is our example also ; and when we look at him, it must not be as to one very eminent and successful in one point only, but perfect and triumphant in all.

This view of Christ as “ the tempted One ” is of great importance to the believer. How apt are we, if we be especially tempted in one particular, to become absorbed in that one trial, and to let other temptations make head unawares ! How much do we need the practical teaching of our Lord’s temptation to remind us that his followers must aim at perfection in *all* ! How much to show us that we must be ready for conflict after conflict following each other like the waves of the in-coming tide ! The Christian at times bemoans himself, saying, “ I have so many temptations, — temptations in my business and in my home, amongst my fellow-men and in solitude ; no sooner does one go than another comes ; ” yet, after all, what is it but his undergoing, in his small way, what was so thoroughly undergone by his Lord ?

But let us turn to the revelation which this gives us of Satan’s attempt *by various ways to gain the one end*. To bring Christ into sin, to make him dishonor his Father, was the one grand aim of all his effort. There is a terrible unity of satanic design, but one aim is pursued ; steadily and earnestly that is kept in view ; it is the hurt, or, if possible, the ruin

of the immortal soul. What solemn reflections does this suggest to us! Amid all the occupations of business, all the relaxations of pleasure, all that comforts, all that vexes man, there is one who undistractedly aims at compassing eternal death. And if this present an awful contemplation as regards the believer, how much more awful a one does it present as regards the world? Day after day it pursues its round of frivolity or heedlessness, its turmoil either of profit or pleasure, unsubdued by the pressure of any solemn thought; there is no calmness, no serious, measured tread in its daily walk; and all the while, day after day, with careful thought, with all the seriousness which a knowledge of the momentous stake at issue can confer, Satan mingles with it, planning and working out those diabolical spells, wherewith he seeks its ruin.

Oh! we may rest assured that Satan is a being terribly calm, terribly serious, terribly collected; he has a weighty concern in hand; he has to direct mighty forces; he has to manipulate the most delicate machinery; if he were embodied before us, we should see thought knitting his brow, and fixed earnestness deeply seated in his eye. It may be that a grim smile would play for a moment around his mouth, as he saw the success of some well-laid plan; but no part would he take in the light merriment of the beings whom he is seeking so earnestly to ensnare. There are probably few wonders connected with man, which are more wonderful to beings of the spiritual world than their frivolity. The evil one was calm and collected in working out the

great temptation of our Lord ; he is equally so in working out ours.

There is certainly a great development of Satan in his use of various ways to gain one end. Let us just look at his resources. He did not give up with our Lord because one arrow had failed ; he had more in his quiver ; and he immediately shot again. And when Satan fails with us, being unable by any one method to bring us into a particular sin, let us remember that he has not spent himself ; but that he has other resources to produce this very end. We may think, perhaps, that he is now aiming at another mark ; that he has confessed himself defeated in his original purpose, and is going off to something else ; but it is not of necessity thus ; he may be only trying by some roundabout way to accomplish what he failed to do more directly.

When we see the evil one trying various temptations before he leaves our Lord, we see the greatness of his perseverance as well as of his resources. He does not on one failure throw the matter up in disgust. The evil one knows well the value of perseverance and patience ; if he fail, it is but to try again ; what does not succeed in one way may in another ; what fails to-day may not to-morrow, or, perhaps, in a week, or a twelvemonth hence. We must learn from this ; we must meet perseverance with perseverance, and must consider that even when we are only persevering, we are conquering. Our blessed Lord met all his varied trials with steady perseverance ; there was no yielding from weariness ;

we must do the same ; and we must be cheerful in doing it, being assured that by grace we are, in our measure, acting after the pattern of our Lord, and shall be made sharers in his success.

Let us mark, also, *the determination of the foe*. One defeat was not enough to make him despair, — yea, defeat after defeat ; his whole being was set upon success ; and he tries our Lord until his last chance was gone. Jesus met the determination of Satan with a like determination in himself ; he gave no symptom of yielding ; he opposed a stern front to the enemy from beginning to end ; and the moral value of that determination was no doubt immense, and told upon the enemy in this lengthened and varied trial. Determination has the same value now that it had then ; Satan is ever on the look-out for the first symptom of wavering, for some little sign of irresolution, for some faltering in our saying “No,” for some shading off of our opinion of the line that divides right from wrong, for the loosening of some one buckle, or the disarrangement of some one plate of the armor of the soul. He has a wonderful eye to spy out this ; he has a wonderful ear to catch exact tones of voice ; he knows the meaning of the heart, not only from words, but tones ; he can discern a quiver of the lip, where we think the mouth is firmly set. We often have ourselves to blame that he stays with us so long ; he would often go sooner, if we did not give him reason to believe that he had some chance by staying ; his hope is not so much in himself as in us.

We need only note further *the great value that the wicked one puts upon success.* He did all he could to triumph over Christ. Satan knows the value of a soul ; he is not working with vague ideas as to what success will involve ; his stake is plainly before him, and all else is insignificant and valueless in comparison with it. There will be no trifling, no mere by-play when this is the case, and we may be assured there is none with Satan. He may have to do with trifles, but then it is that he may destroy a soul with them ; a lifetime may be made up of trifles and trifling, but then they may answer Satan's purpose better than stronger forms of temptation.

In the case before us, however, they were all strong temptations, and their variety shows us that we must expect our trials to come from various quarters. Jesus appears to have *gone through regular processes of temptation*, and his disciples have to do the same. Sometimes Satan is making experiments upon the human heart, sometimes he is acting simply upon well-known rules of temptation ; but in either case, the varied trial is a part of the process of evil, which, if we be one with Jesus, will issue in our soul's good. There is a certain chemistry to which the heart is subjected, and if it stand the fire, it will invariably emerge from it blanched and purified. Not that the heart of Jesus could be made any purer than it was ; he entered his temptation perfect, and perfect he came forth from it ; but our hearts are thus sanctified ; every process gets rid of some evil, and makes the heart more susceptible of that polish

which reflects the image of God and the light of heaven.

At length the end of this varied and protracted temptation draws near ; “ weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” The time comes for Satan to depart, and we have the blessed record, “ Then the devil leaveth him.”

What happened hereupon is brought before us by a glorious “ And ; ” for the simple negative blessing of the departure of the evil one is not Christ’s only reward ; there is something positive, — “ and angels came and ministered unto him.” Only let us observe, before we enter upon this angelic ministration, that the evil one did not leave permanently. Jesus experienced what all on earth must do, that the temptation of the evil one is a life-long trial, and that we are not beyond the reach of this temptation so long as we are in the flesh. In Luke iv. 13, we are told that, “ when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him *for a season.*” All along he had his eye on Jesus ; and, as opportunity offered, tempted him, if by any means he could fasten on him some reproach, or cause to pass over his holy spirit some dark shade of sin. We can easily conjecture how Satan tried him from time to time, — to impatience, when the Samaritans refused to receive him ; to disobedience, in grasping the proffered sovereignty of the Jews, before the time appointed of the Father ; to mere human anger, with his stupid disciples, and so forth. The devil was not without opportunities of tempting him in his

daily life, and we may be sure that, from time to time, he returned to the charge. We know that there was one more terrible meeting between them ; for Jesus himself says in John xiv. 30, " Hereafter I will not talk much with you ; for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." " This is your hour," said he, in Luke xxii. 53, " and the power of darkness."

There is indeed no permanent spiritual rest for any believer on this side of the grave. We may have long intervals of freedom from temptation ; there are long spells of fine weather, but the enemy is not asleep or dead ; sooner or later he will turn up again. He who navigates the sea, the utmost shore of which is the land of everlasting light, meets with no trade wind, under the genial influence of which he has only to set his sails, and speed smoothly on the even tenor of his way ; at any moment the gust may rush upon him, and the waves break over him, and he himself be ready to cry, " Lord, save me, or I perish." Well, then, may we rejoice with trembling ; well may we keep our swords girded upon the thigh ; well may we refuse to have anything to do with such slothful confidence and security as are dear to our poor fallen flesh. " There remaineth a rest for the people of God ;" when that is attained, we need not sigh as we look at each lovely flower, for fear it will be broken by some sweeping tempest, or wasted by canker and decay ; we need not weep as we listen to entrancing music, lest beneath its melodies there lie the fatal witchery of a syren's song ; we need not re-

strain the boundings of our heart, for fear that, after all, the joy is but for a moment, and heavy clouds must chill the warmth, and dim the brightness of our sun. Oh, no! then we shall have done with temptation and with sin, with the tempter and his wiles; and all the brightness and the joy which God has given us shall be ours forever. Distressing fear and weary watching, and all the uncertainties of the state of warfare, shall have passed never to return; for the tempted ones shall be with Him that conquered *for* them, and conquered *in* them, that they may be one with him, and in him for evermore!

When the storm has passed, the sun which was obscured shines out in all his strength, and makes every rain-drop glitter with topaz and ruby and emerald light. When the storm has passed, the wild winds which swept with the rage of giants through the forest-trees now murmur softly through every leafy glade. When the storm has passed, the waves which roared and tossed themselves, and broke in fury upon the shore, now dissolve mysteriously in gentle ripples along the whispering strand. And when the storm which swept athwart the soul of Jesus has passed, "THEN the devil leaveth him; and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him!" and not to Jesus only, but also through him to all his people who can understand the bearing of Christ's sufferings upon their own, — the teachings which underlie this satanic temptation, this angelic ministration.

Let us turn our attention now, not to curious spec-

ulation, but to gathering up some of the teachings which are provided for us here, and which are calculated to bear beneficially upon our own spiritual life.

The first of these which we would notice is the truth that, —

The suspension of comfort is only temporary. There was, doubtless, decided suspension of comfort for a season in the case of our Lord, who was during his temptation in immediate contact with the one most hateful to him, and to a great extent subject to his horrible will. Satan had permission to put forth his will against Jesus, though that will never did, never could, bring him into sin.

Now God's people unquestionably know what it is to undergo suspension of comfort. St. Paul says, in 1 Cor. iv. 8, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;" and his experience is more or less that of every man who follows in the footprints of his Lord. How often in the lives of good men do we find them bemoaning from one cause or another their loss of comfort. So thickly are the notices of these suspensions of comfort scattered over the biographies of God's most eminent saints, that it would be a very easy matter to fill a volume with them. Let one suffice, — one from the life of a very eminent child of God, — one showing how even the height of spiritual exaltation does not give immunity from the depth of spiritual depression.

"Aug. 9th, 1794. — I recollect once Marsden's tell

ing me of a remarkable instance in that dear man of God, Mr. Simeon. Mr. Marsden, you know, was his intimate friend, and had access to him even in his most retired moments. He told me that he called once upon him, and found him so absorbed in the contemplation of the Son of God, and so overpowered with a display of his mercy to his soul, that, full of the animating theme, he was incapable of pronouncing a single word. At length, after an interval, with accents big, he exclaimed, 'Glory, glory, glory!' The relation of this affected me much, I remember, and I asked myself, 'Why I was so much a stranger to it? Why such coldness in *my* soul? If I love, why am I thus? You see a pattern of Christian zeal and fervency in that man of God, but what do you pretend to? you have neither part nor lot in the matter.' Such were my reasonings; these led soon to discouragement, and the enemy suggested, 'You are yet in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity;' for certainly I thought that profession of religion is vain which is not built on the present possession of its joys. Sunday evening came, when we were to attend his lecture; I went with a heavy heart. 'If Mr. Simeon,' I said to myself, 'who is so full of religious joy, and so flourishing in his soul, knew me and my barrenness, he would not suffer me to enter into his presence.' Such was my feeling, when, on coming to him, I found this child of God in tenfold more misery than myself. He could scarcely discourse now, from a deep humiliation and contrition; humbled before God, he could only cry out, 'My leanness,

my leanness!’ and striking on his breast, uttered the publican’s prayer. This was the reverse of the scene. I now perceived that God dispenses his favors when and how he pleases,—that he suits his dispensations to our several states and wants, and that the safest method we can take is to be sober and vigilant to watch unto prayer; that discouragements should not arise from occasional difficulties; but that we should consider the religious life subject to those vicissitudes which we observe in the natural life.”

But what we are to dwell upon principally now is the fact that this suspension of comfort does not involve any suspension of acceptance with God. We sometimes think that it does,—it is the aim of Satan that we should do so; but we must have spiritual discernment, and firmly believe our Father to be unchanged. The sun still shines, though clouds obscure it to our view; our Father still loves, though the enchantment of Satan has enveloped us in mists and fogs, and spread a covering of clouds over our heads.

How immensely would it help us if we could rightly judge this suspension of comfort,—if we could feel at the time when its cold and clammy breath was upon us, “This is but a fog; it is dense and yet it is immaterial; it can oppose no real bar to my acceptance with my Father; I will not judge of my safety by my comfort; I will not believe that the mists which cling around me below are clinging also around the throne above.” Christ’s acceptance with God was untouched by any nearness with which Sa-

tan could approach him, ours is the same ; the tossing of the ship at sea does not involve her being foundered in its depths, or wrecked upon its shores. Whatever may come upon the believer, let him steadfastly hold fast the truth of his acceptance with God. He may have many discomforts, such as the remembrance of sin, the promptings of his body, or of his mind, which come in spite of his will ; he may have particular temptations, — yes, and he may have failures to bemoan, or he may be under some chastening and discipline of the Father. It is impossible to catalogue what may be the causes of discomfort to the soul, even as it would be to catalogue those of the body ; but acceptance with God is not dependent upon mere human comfort, but upon divine truthfulness ; a tried and tempted and suffering son is still a son indeed ; a man may sail safely out of sight of land.

It is easy to see what immense advantage accrues from a clear perception and a firm hold of this. The believer who realizes this truth can devote all his energies to the conflict in which he is engaged ; he has not to spend his strength in debating as to whether he is a child of God or not ; he has a firmness and boldness which leave him at liberty to judge, as well as to endure, the discomfort in which he is placed. Moreover, he can rely upon God. His Father is in no wise changed towards him ; he is not purchasing his favor, or purchasing his own salvation ; the Father hath given unto him eternal life, and he will help him in all straits which meet him on the road to his eternal home. Moreover, he says, “ This is temporary ;

it may last long ; but it is not to be forever. I see *an* end, though not *the* end. Where *the* end is to be, or how it is to come in view, I leave with God ; enough for me that of *an* end I am assured." Let us remember the trials of our Lord ; they had a turning-point, a "THEN," and that "THEN" had a positive as well as a negative side, — Then the devil leaveth him ; and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him."

Next we are cheered by the thought that *there is blessing at the end of temptation overcome*. The devil went ; the angels came ; when temptation was ended, ministry began. No spiritual trial ends in a mere blank ; that which for the present is not joyous, but grievous, in the end yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness ; when the due season has come, if we have not fainted, we shall reap. "What is at the end of all this ?" is a question which often disquiets the child of God ; the answer is, "Blessing, if you resist after the example of our Lord." The blessing may be sooner or later ; the question is not one of fact, but of time ; it is destined to succeed the temptation, unless we disturb it by any shortcomings of our own. Our Lord, no doubt, looked forward to this blessing now ; he looked forward to that which was to come after his life-long obedience and conflict ; it was to come in the order of his Father's government ; and thus it comes to us as it did to him.

If our temptation meet us in purely spiritual things, peace ineffable, or it may be joy unspeakable ; follows the departure of our foe. At times these

come so quickly that they are with us almost before the enemy is out of sight. "One evening, after the fatigue of much business, while in secret prayer, the Lord Jesus drew unexpectedly nigh; quick as lightning he touched my heart with the fire of his love. I very soon found it was preparatory to trials from which I suffered keenly for some time. I cried to my God to help, and to lead me into his will, which in mercy he soon did; he pointed out my way, and gave me power to walk in it, trusting in himself, rising above nature's false feelings, and victory quickly followed. A song of grateful praise was put into my mouth, and into the hearts of others particularly concerned in the final issue of the affair. O God, who is a God like unto thee? How often have I proved thee in various kinds of straits a present aid! Bless the Lord, O my soul!" And again: "*Nov. 1st.* — Since the 11th of October, words would fail to tell of the goodness of the Lord, in public and private, at home and abroad, in the house and by the way. Not in exemption from temptation, — no, but in support and comfort under it, and in deliverances from it, in repeated manifestations of his love and power, in sweet fellowship with the Father and Son. At one time, while enduring a flood of temptation, Jehovah drew so nigh, appeared so clear to the eye of faith, so penetrated my soul with a sense of his presence, as might well excite my wonder, love, and praise. He so confounded the powers of darkness, so sensibly lifted up a standard, as made all within confess a present God; and he has thus abode with me ever

since, though not always with the same degree of love, joy, or freedom from temptation; yet, so as often made me involuntarily to express these words: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'" (*Diary of Lady Maxwell.*)

"*Sat. 18th.* — From morning until now, that is, until eleven at night, I have enjoyed a continual feast within. Christ has been unspeakably precious to my heart, and the blessed Spirit of God has visited me with sweet and reviving manifestations. Temptations, of a particular kind, beset me more than once, but the Lord lifted up his standard, and I fell not; the gates of hell attacked me, but did not prevail against the grace of God which was with me. Glory be to God on high, who spreads a table for me in the wilderness, making me to banquet on his love, and who has caused my cup of joy to overflow this day." (*Life of Toplady.*)

Perhaps at the departure of the temptation, we are *given* lawfully what we were tempted to *take* unlawfully; we have the blessing of the Lord which maketh rich, and he addeth no bitterness therewith. Or the blessing may possibly take the form of our being made fully acquainted with the evil of that to which we were tempted; and then the heart will feel like a bird escaped out of the net of the fowler; and gratitude and admiration and thanksgiving will fill it, as it thinks what might have been its fate, had it yielded to the fatal snare.

And in the matter of earthly blessings, — things good in themselves, but from which we were with-

held, because it was not God's time to give them, or because they could only be grasped in a way which was out of the order of his providence, if not positively against it, — how often, when our probation has been gone through, does God give them, and then they have the flavor and wholesomeness of ripe fruit. When we are given the desire of our heart, it is an immense increase to our enjoyment of it, when we can say, "I feel I have God's blessing in it; I have used no by means to get it; I have not made undue haste to lay hands on it."

Perhaps we can say, "I was often tempted to take it, to forestall God's providential ordering, but by his grace I resisted; and now I may eat, when he himself spreads the table before me." There is such a thing as "relish" in partaking of whatever we have; and we certainly cannot have lasting relish in anything in which the blessing is not, although our feverish eagerness may enable us to enjoy it for a moment.

In the homely affairs of daily life, much comfort to endure delays, much strength to resist temptations, would be afforded if this were remembered. If we were persuaded that we need not hurry unduly, that delay is not loss, that God will never let us really lose for waiting upon him, we should be able to go through life with a calm, unclouded judgment, which would discern, judge, and successfully resist temptation. God had his own method of providing for his Son. He sent by angels what Satan would have given in another way. Oh, how differ-

ent was the food which came as the gift of God from that which he might have had at the suggestion of the devil !

We see here, also, how *there is triumph over Satan in the point in which he wants to triumph.*

God's people have continually to meet Satan on the ground of his own choice. They cannot choose the scenes of their temptations ; he will take them upon the ground that he deems most favorable to himself. This fact presents itself before us with a double aspect, — one of awfulness that we should be so far subjected to satanic will, and one of joy that it should be given to us to conquer our mortal foe, even when he has every advantage at his command. Our Lord here conquered Satan upon his own ground ; we, if we follow him, shall do the like. There are times when, do what we will, we cannot help being led into circumstances of temptation, but we need not of necessity be downcast on that account ; it by no means follows that the ground of Satan's choosing is to be that of his victory.

As regards us, we have this farther triumph, — that as we grow in the grace which is the opposite of the temptation in which our ruin was designed. It is in circumstances naturally calculated to make a man distrust that we learn most to trust, — in circumstances calculated to make us proud that we learn humility, — in circumstances calculated to make us timid that we learn boldness. The exercise of soul, which we have to go through in our conflict to resist the temptation to particular evil, works

in us the corresponding good; most believers are shaped for heaven in furnace heat on earth. See how an eminent servant of God (Toplady) meets the temptation to pride, and how its effect is to make his heart more deeply humble.

“*Friday 12th.* — A little before bed-time, I darted up an ejaculation that God would be pleased to strengthen me, and give me faithfulness in the discharge of my duty toward the parishioners of Broad-Hembury, whither I expect soon to remove. My God gave me this sweet answer immediately: ‘I will enable thee and bless thee.’ Behold the servant of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word.

“I desire to remember, with grief and shame, that soon after the above manifestation to my soul, I was tempted before I could get to sleep, with high thoughts of my own righteousness both as a man and as a minister. The enemy plied his fiery darts very thick, and came in as a flood, but the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard against him. I was enabled (glory to divine grace!) to reject the cursed insinuations as I would hell fire. Oh! that ever such a wretch as I should be tempted to think highly of himself! I, that am of myself nothing but sin and weakness; I, in whose flesh naturally dwells no good thing; I, who deserve damnation for the best work I ever performed! Lord Jesus, humble me to the dust; yea, to the very centre of abasement in thy presence! Root out, and tear up this most poisonous, this most accursed weed from the unworthiest heart that ever was. Show me my utter nothingness. Keep me sensible of my sinnership.

Sink me down deeper and deeper into penitence and self-abhorrence. Break the dagon of pride in pieces before the ark of thy merits. Demolish by the breath of thy Spirit, the walls, the Babel of self-righteousness and self-opinion; level them with the trodden soil; grind them to powder, annihilate them for ever and ever. Grace, grace, be all my experience and all my cry. Amen. Amen."

In this advent of the angels we have also *a divine recognition of successful conflict*. Let us observe this well because it is of the greatest moment in strengthening and upholding the soul. The Father had marked every stage of the temptation; and although he makes no appearance while it was going on, yet he comes forth in glorious recognition as soon as it was past.

God's eye ranges over all the field of spiritual strife. There are some who are battling against evil in companies, some who are waging the war in solitude; there are those whose strife all men can see; and yet again those whose conflict is like that of Jesus in the wilderness; but the Father marks all and marks *each*. Jesus was an individual. It was as an individual that God looked at him, and upon us also as individuals he looks, one by one. And that look is not only for scrutiny; it is for recognition also, to note every little success, every stout resistance, every hatred of the evil which is endeavored to be cast upon us. And with the Father is the Son. He who was so fiercely tempted watches us in our temptation. "I know," he says, "how thou hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted."

(Rev. ii. 3.) "Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith." (Rev. ii. 13.) "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." (Rev. iii. 8.) We must not allow ourselves to be lost in the crowd; the eye which rested upon the solitary Man in the wilderness is resting upon us, and with a large and generous heart, God will recognize our measures of success!

Yes! we may well speak of the generosity of God. He is not watching for our halting, as our suspicious hearts too often feel; and with the feeling comes depression. He is rather watching for our success, just as the parent watches to see how many steps the little one will take, and not how often it will fall. The perfect success of Christ is our perfection, so far as all judgment is concerned and we see here how this success is recognized by God. We have not to do with a God who is trying us for our life, but with One who, having given us life in Christ, would have us put forth the actings of that life in conflict with the one who is alike his great enemy and ours.

Let us, then, be greatly cheered in our daily strife. If a kind word or even a smile — which is love's unspoken word — be payment for effort made, or agony endured; if to be mentioned in a despatch be reward for peril of life or limb; if the heart bounds, and the energies stretch themselves out for fresh effort, when what we have done is appreciated and recognized, then let the believer take heart, for God appreciates and recognizes every struggle of his daily life. The advent of the angels to the triumphant Lord is an advent to us, his followers, also; for he

was man for us men ; and as we are partakers of his sufferings, so also are we of his joys. It may be that those around us cannot recognize either our conflict or our victory ; it is not necessary that they should ; these may be secret, like the wilderness experiences of our Lord ;—may it not be, also, that they cannot recognize our refreshment and our joy,—the prince of evil departing from us, messengers from heaven coming and ministering unto us.

“ Angels came and ministered unto him.” *There was divine provision for exhaustion.* God has shown himself in Holy Scripture very pitiful in cases of exhaustion. When the water was spent in Hagar’s bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs, and went and sat her down against him, as it were a bow-shot, for she said, Let me not see the death of the child, God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. When Lot was fleeing from the doomed cities of the plain, he cries to God that he cannot escape to the mountain, “ behold now this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one ; oh, let me escape thither, [is it not a little one ?] and my soul shall live ; and he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing, also, that I will not overthrow this city for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither, for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither.” When Elijah fled from Jezebel, “ and lay and slept under the juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat.

And he looked, and, behold! there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head; and he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And a second time the angel of the Lord came to him, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee; and in the strength of that meat he went forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God." "O my lord," said Daniel (chap. x.), "by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there any breath left in me. Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, and he said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee; be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak, for thou hast strengthened me." Jesus would not "send the people away fasting, lest they should faint by the way, for divers of them came from far."

Many of God's people have been greatly exhausted after protracted spiritual conflict. The tension of the mind, the tension of the will, have told upon them. God has marked their state, and given them the cordial which they needed. No child of God ever yet perished from spiritual exhaustion. God has his own methods of pouring in consolation, — meat for his people which the world knows not of. Nor is it any disgrace for us to feel exhausted; we are only flesh and blood; we are liable to the power of reaction; but our comfort and our strength lie here:

that God knows all about it, and he will provide for it ; and we also shall have a table spread for us in the wilderness ; and we shall have our strength recruited and repaired from heavenly stores.

Let us, then, take courage, even though there lie before us a path strewn with temptations, or solitudes in which we shall be tried by the evil one himself. The Captain of our salvation has taken experimental knowledge of all that Satan can do, and of his methods of doing it ; and his skill, his experience, his sympathy, and his example are all available for us. The conflict which he carried on single-handed for so long a time with the prince of this world was intended, amongst other designs, to comfort and sustain those, who, following his example, would enter the lists with the world, the flesh, and the devil. For our sakes, as well as his, did the angels come at the end of that long, weary time of strife ; for Christ's people are one with him ; and the ministry wherewith he was comforted he shares with those who, battling for his sake, and with him, are in need of comfort also. Ours be the conflict, not self-sought, but as we are called thereto of God, and ours shall be the comfort ; ours be the endurance, and ours shall be the after-peace. Perhaps our conflict shall be protracted, even to the closing hours of life ; and we shall have to stand fast even amid the failing of flesh and blood ; but the evil one shall be discomfited, whatever we may have to endure : the last trial comes — is past ; life-long temptation ends upon that Christian's dying bed : " Then " — " then the devil leaveth him ; and, behold angels come and minister unto him."



II.

Here.

"Then the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said unto him Abraham, Abraham; and he said, Here am I." — GEN. XXII. 11.

WHEN God called unto Adam in Paradise, after he had eaten of the forbidden fruit, and said unto him, "Where art thou?" the answer which came from his coward heart was this, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself." The circumstances of the speaker and the answer which he gave fitted well together.

When God called to Abraham in the land of Moriah, as he stood by the altar of sacrifice, whereon there lay his only son, and said, "Abraham, Abraham," the answer which came from his noble heart was this, "Here am I." In this case, also, the circumstances of the speaker and the answer which he gave fitted well together.

Adam is the representative father of men in the flesh, who go out from the presence of the Lord in disobedience, and with the foretaste of a curse;

Abraham is the representative father of men in the spirit, who stand in the presence of the Lord in obedience, and with the foretaste of a blessing,—the one is in disobedience, not having been able to keep from eating of the forbidden fruit; the other is in obedience; even to being in readiness to slay his only son.

This solitary word, dear reader, is full of instruction for you and for me. How does it shame us for our many false positions in the past! how does it question us as to our position at the present! how does it make us almost tremble as to our position in the future! God only can tell what lies before us; when the voice speaks to us from heaven, shall we be found in the right position, in the right place,—ready, at a moment's notice, to say, "Here am I"?

Let me begin our reflections on this word by considering THE POSITION OF ABRAHAM AS HE UTTERED IT.

We cannot but think of him in two different aspects,—in his *natural* and in his *spiritual* man: in either aspect his word is very wonderful, is very great.

Look at him in his natural man. *What a destruction was there here of his natural hopes!* Long had he expected Isaac; fondly had he reared him; much had he looked for from him; and now, to see all this about to be blasted, as in a moment, was terrible indeed. Those hopes of Abraham were natural; they rose in his heart day by day, and wound themselves into his being, and spread themselves forward, even to the horizon of his earthly vision;

just as our hopes of our children do in our daily thinking, planning, hoping life. Isaac was the heir; but now heirship, sonship, everything was to come to an end together. Could anything be more trying to flesh and blood than this?

And thus is the believer often tried, — he sees his natural hopes, his just expectations, about to come to nothing. I do not refer, dear reader, to anything unreasonable, but to what we had a legitimate right to look for in the ordinary course of events. Do we not often think very hardly of the arrangements of God's providence, when we see ourselves about to be disappointed of what we thought we had a right to expect? Indeed, we do; and we either ignore God altogether, and talk of our "bad luck," or else we think hardly of him; we think "he might have made it turn out all right." We do not take up Abraham's position by the side of the altar, and make use of Abraham's words and say, "Here am I."

Many a parent has educated a child to manhood or to womanhood; all the toils and expenses of education are now over; "Surely," says the father or the mother, "this one will comfort me in my old age; in this child's position or success I shall see the fruit of all my toil;" proudly looks the doting father upon the opening graces of womanhood; proudly, the doting mother upon the promising talent of manhood. Then comes a voice from heaven; and where art thou, O father? where art thou, O mother? Canst thou present thyself as standing beside the altar of sacrifice, and say, "HERE am I"?

God forbid that we should make light, poor, tried,

and sorrowing one, of any of thy trials, losses, or distresses. We are not of the number of those who pooh pooh the trials of life, because they end with life; we firmly believe in the reality of human vexation, grief, and loss; but we believe, also, that where we should be found is by the altar of sacrifice; we, too, should be able to say this deep, this wondrous "Here!"

There is another aspect in which we must look at Abraham's natural man; *that is, the wringing of his heart.*

Isaac was now twenty-eight years old. He had twined himself around his father's heart in infancy, in boyhood, and in manhood; and now all the fibres of love, which for many a year had thus woven themselves around Abraham's heart, were to be cut asunder in a moment; and he was to be left in sadness and desolation for the remainder of his days. The terms in which God gave the command, in verse 2, seem as though they were intended to try the patriarch in this very particular: "Take now thy *son*, thine *only* son Isaac, *whom thou lovest.*" To have said, "thy *son*," would have been bad enough; but to say "thine *only* son," and, moreover, "*whom thou lovest*," that was far worse. It almost seemed like throwing impediments in Abraham's way, like deliberately making the sacrifice as hard as possible. Abraham was to enter upon this work in a full consciousness of its bitterness, and not merely to find out how hard it was when it was too late for him to retract. Many a gloomy thought passed through Abraham's heart as he travelled to the sacrificial

mount; often and often did he look at Isaac, with looks such as he had never fixed upon him before. It may be that he recalled the first hour of his joy, when the infant's feeble cry told him that the child of promise had been born; that there came before his mind's eye the first smile of his infant's recognition; that he remembered the merry laughs of his boyish sports; that he reflected upon the companionship afforded by his opening manhood; perhaps Abraham hung over him as he slept in his tent, and at once printed upon his forehead a father's kiss, and moistened that forehead with a father's tear. Who can tell how much Abraham felt, unless placed in the position in which Abraham was. Men are often footsore and blistered in their long journeys on earth; but Abraham was heart-sore, heart-blistered, as he travelled onward to that fatal mount.

And, if it were thus with him, as he travelled on to Mount Moriah, what must it have been when he got there! When Isaac was really bound, when the wood was ready to blaze, when the knife was ready to fall, when blood was ready to flow, what then must have been the natural feelings of the man Abraham's heart! We can but faintly picture to ourselves what the father of the faithful must have felt, as he stood by that altar of sacrifice, and said "‘HERE’ am I."

And have not believers nowadays their wringing heart-sorrows also? Do they not sometimes hear even these very words: "Thy son," "thine *only* son," "*whom thou lovest*"? The preciousness of the sacrifice is brought out in the very command which orders

it to be made. All things that we are about to lose seem precious ; they never seemed so precious before ; even if they were made but little of when we had them, they seem of worth now they are about to be taken from us ; and we cannot lose what is dear, without more or less wringing of the heart. Under these circumstances are we, dear reader, likely to be able to take up Abraham's words and say, " **HERE** am I." Many of the sacrifices which we have to make are not, cannot be, cheap ; shall we be dragged to the altar, or shall we travel thither ? Shall we say, " Here am I, bound in an iron fetter of God's arrangement, which I cannot withstand, although I would if I could " ? or shall we be able to say, " Here am I ; much it has cost me to come hither ; but hither have I willingly come at thy command " ?

Let us not think for a moment that God is insensible to our trial ; that he does not sound the depths of our sufferings ; that when he gives a command, he does not fully understand all that it entails on us. Man certainly does not always understand the amount of sacrifice He calls upon us to make. We sometimes have inward agonies that he cannot see ; but God knows all, and we may rest assured that he will help us on our way to the altar, and at the altar itself. It may be that we say, " This I will do, but how shall I be able to go through with it ? " Ah ! the God of Abraham who upheld him as he journeyed to Moriah will uphold you ; and you in due season will be able to present yourself in the proper place, and say, " **HERE** am I."

Of this we need not say more at present, as we

shall have to show, by and by, how Abraham came to be able to fill that wondrous position by the altar-side ; meanwhile, we would remind the reader that he should comfort himself when in sorrow, and comfort his believing friends also, with the remembrance that God knew the fulness of the severity of the trial that he imposed on Abraham. He knows the meaning of the words, “ thy son ” — “ thine only son ” — “ whom thou lovest.” He knows the meaning of what he appoints for you. He will not appoint what is impossible. If he appoint you anything to go through, he means to strengthen you as you go through it ; and be assured he will not undervalue the meaning of that word “ Here,” when you are by his grace enabled to say it ; he will know what it means and what it cost.

Nor let us forget Sarah in our estimate of the trials which now came upon Abraham. How would Abraham meet her, when he returned from Moriah ? What would *he* say when *she* said, “ Where is my son ? ” Would he try to escape from her ? Ah ! she would clutch the skirt of his robe, and say, perhaps with the frantic passion, perhaps with the cold determination of a mother’s anguish, “ I will not let thee go until I know about my child.” Would he turn away his eyes from her ? Ah ! she would turn hers as he turned his, and look into his very soul ; and those eyes would burn into him as though their orbs were coals of fire ; like lightning flashes they would blind him with the brightness of their scorching agony. It may be that Sarah would have reminded Abraham with terrible calmness that Isaac

was their only child ; it may be that she would have whispered with solemn gestures that he was a child of mystery ; that Heaven itself had thought it well to announce his birth ; then, changing from the mother to the wife, perhaps she would have reminded him again how this boy had been long waited for ; and how, when he came, he had made melody in their home, the music which a child alone can make. How often had they watched him together at the door of their tent, as he enjoyed his boyish sports, and looked at him and then at one another, and felt the mystery of that child ! Perhaps Sarah had stood at the tent-door, when they went away in the dim light of the early morn, and followed them awhile, and said farewell again and again ; and the last they saw on the horizon's verge was a speck, and that speck was the anxious mother. Or maybe while she slept Abraham departed silently with her child. Where is he now ? Ah ! to satisfy that woman, would have been a task difficult indeed. And the terrible picture has its likeness reflected in some degree in the believer's trials now. The wife does not always go with the husband, or the husband with the wife, in obedience to God's command,—does not perhaps even know of it. The greatest trial to an obedient believer is often to be found in his own house, in the education of his children, in the expenditure of money for God, in taking up a distinctive position as regards the world. In such things it often happens that husband and wife are not one. He who will act in faith, and be of the seed of faithful Abraham, must look only to the

command, and erect the altar, and stand by it, and say, "Here am I!"

We have yet one more observation to make as regards Abraham's natural man, and it is this: *the apparent unreasonableness of it*. We can well imagine how the patriarch's reason might have rebelled against God's command; how he might have argued with God; how he might have set natural feeling against implicit obedience, and declined what he could not understand. Has not this been the case very often with God's people? Thus it was with Moses: "And it came to pass on the day when the Lord spake unto Moses in the land of Egypt, that the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, I am the Lord: speak thou unto Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say unto thee. And Moses said before the Lord, Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me?" (Exod. vi. 28-30.) Thus it was with Jonah: "The word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me." It seemed unreasonable that he, a solitary man, could do anything in that *great* city, in a city where the *wickedness* was great; so instead of going to Nineveh, "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." (Jonah i. 1-4.) Thus it was with Ananias, whom the Lord commissioned to go and anoint the eyes of Saul: "The Lord said unto him Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold he prayeth; and hath seen in a

vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight." One would have thought that Ananias would have been somewhat reassured by hearing that this terrible Saul was "praying." Not so, however: "Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem. And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name." (Acts ix. 13, etc.) Once more; look at the case of the disciples in John xi. Jesus says, "Let us go into Judea again;" but no alacrity is shown to follow their Lord. "His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?" and when Jesus says, "Let us go unto him" (that is, to Lazarus, and consequently into the dreaded Judea), in all the deep despondency which conference with flesh and blood inspires, Thomas answers, "Let us go, that we may die with him." Death is the only result that presents itself to a conference with flesh and blood. If we take counsel with flesh and blood, we shall always find that it has plenty of reasons to give against unquestioning obedience.

Can we imagine any apparently more unreasonable command than this which Abraham received? Have we any instance in the whole Bible where a man might seem to have such cause for demurring to obey? Human nature, the very instinct of being, revolted against obedience; but unmurmuring, unappalled, the father of the faithful, as soon as he had received the command, "rose up early in the morning, and sad-

dled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up and went unto the place of which God had told him." Everything on the side of the flesh was against the performance of God's command, — to have held any communion at all with it, would have been to be undone ; but Abraham held no conference with it; if he had, never would he have said the word we are considering now, "' HERE ' am I."

May it be given to us to have a like faith to Abraham's, — a faith which will have no reasonings, no disputings, no want of explanations, when God gives a direct command. Let us rest assured that God always has his own reasons; that in his own time he will make it all right. The beautiful words of our hymn are true: —

" Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain ;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain."

Reason could never have uttered the words where-with Faith in this place answers God, " HERE am I."

Thus we see how wonderful was Abraham's position as regards his natural man when he uttered these memorable words; let us remember that his position was equally wonderful as regards his spiritual man. For, first of all, *were not all the promises to be fulfilled in Isaac?* Abraham had once been guilty of the very sin which we have just been considering; he had staggered at what seemed unreasonable; his faith had been feeble as regards

Isaac's birth, though it was so strong in his approaching terrible death. When God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be; and I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her; and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!" But it was not in Ishmael that the promises were to be fulfilled; blessings were indeed given to him, but the Lord's words were, "My covenant will I establish with Isaac." And what is to become of these? might Abraham well have thought, as he stood by the fatal altar on which his son lay bound. Ishmael is cut off as the transmitter of the blessing; everything is bound up in this youth, who in a few moments more must cease to live; it was a sore trial to Abraham, as a believer in the truth of God.

In this very way are the Lord's people now often tried. The promise seems about to fail; what was indicated as the channel through which the blessing was to come seems about to be filled up; faith is put to a sore trial; and with us, how often does it fail? If we have spiritual life, that life will be tried; it will be tried in spiritual ways; we, as Abraham was here, shall be tempted to distrust the truth of God, and his carrying out his own promises and intentions in his own way. Isaac was God's way of blessing, and Abraham might well have said, "Now this way is going to

be closed up." The trial of Abraham's faith was increased by the fact that it was his own hand that was about to be used as the instrument of thus hindering the blessing; but he faltered not, even for a moment. When God called to him, he was found by the altar; his answer was, "'HERE' am I."

We may rest assured, come what will, that God will fulfil his word, and bring his promises out literally true. He has his own ways of doing this; and we must believe that he has, and not abandon a promise as unlikely, because it seems to be so, and cast about hither and thither for good in some other way. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good?" (Psalm iv. 6;) but, amongst the number, there should never be found the child of God. To Abraham it might now have seemed that God was about to go back of his word; all human probability pointed in that direction; but Abraham was above appearances and probabilities; the promises were to be fulfilled in Isaac; that was enough for him.

And here was an especial element in Abraham's trial, *he had no previous instance of resurrection*. If Isaac was slain, childless, as he then was, and if, nevertheless, the promised seed were to come down through him, then what could Abraham have expected, but that, as soon as his son's body had been burnt, God would raise him from the dead again. A heap of smouldering ashes, a handful of dust, was all that was about to be left to the patriarch of his child; but from those ashes, he believed that there would be remoulded the living man, and that Isaac would stand before him again, to fulfil in his person every word of God.

What a voice, dear reader, has this for you and me! How does it speak to us and say, "Trust God even without a precedent, trust him in unknown paths, trust him to be able to work in ways that you know not."

It sometimes happens that we seek to strengthen our faith, by looking for instances in which God did something as wonderful as what we are looking to him to do now. Are we quite sure that in this search we are seeking for a strengthening of our faith? Perhaps it is not weak faith seeking to be strengthened; it may be unbelief practically saying, "How can this be?" such a thing never happened before. We, too, may, in our way, be brought into a like strait with Abraham; and where shall we be if we are depending on precedents of God's acting rather than on God himself? God will have his people rely upon himself, and not upon circumstances or events of any kind. No doubt God's previous actings are of great use to the believer, and he himself tells man to call them to mind (Deut. vii. 18); full many a saint has passed in the power of such remembrances through deep necessities and griefs; but God requires us to have that inner personal life with himself which will make his word law, whether the like has ever been heard before or not.

Abraham's faith, as regards Isaac's resurrection, had nothing to go upon as he stood beside that terrible altar, and said, "'Here' am I;" may our faith be imitative of his, and may we, too, be ready with our "Here am I;" our position, one of simple obedience irrespective of everything else.

Let us mark one point further before we turn from our contemplation of this part of our subject. *Abraham's position at this time had a natural tendency to make him distrust God's love.* There he stood by the altar of sacrifice, the knife in his hand, the fire ready to consume. Could he think that God loved him, when he apparently, without any need, demanded from him so great a sacrifice?

We may rest assured that Abraham's position was one in which he was exposed to continual molestation from the foe; the chance was too good a one for Satan to leave unimproved. But Abraham rose above the natural tendency of his position; that was a part of the triumph of his faith. Everything appeared likely to drift him away from God; but he held fast to God. Who can tell how tremendous were the forces which were drawing him from that spot where he stood, and said, "'Here' am I"? The Father of the Faithful has but led the way in which many of his followers, also, have to walk; they, too, have to contend with the *natural tendencies* of the circumstances in which they are placed; let us remember that those natural tendencies do not excuse us; on the other hand, we are called upon to overcome them. It should be a comfort to the believer to know that God estimates these natural tendencies just as accurately as we do; we cannot say, "He did not know how much I have to contend with." Be assured that in permitting our love to him to be acted against by adverse influences, he knew very well what he was doing.

Yes; it is natural for us to say, "Can God love

me, and yet require such and such a thing of me? He has it in his power to relieve me of my trials; to make this cup pass from me. If he love me, why does he not?" Do we not immediately call to mind the case of him whom God loved above all others, — the only begotten Son? Do we not find him afflicted sorely with the cup he had to drink? But the force of circumstances never compelled him to say, "*If thou lovest me, cause this cup to pass from me?*" He is our example; far overpassing Abraham, he yet witnesses to us together with Abraham; in Gethsemane He said, "'Here' am I" — yea, on Calvary; in our grandest acts of self-surrender and of faith, "Here am I" can be but a faint echo of His.

We see, then, the position of Abraham as he uttered these words. We mark the destruction of his natural hopes, the wringing of his paternal heart, the apparent unreasonableness of the command. We see him tried by what seemed to be the failure of the promises, by the fact that he knew of no previous instance of resurrection, by the natural tendency of events to make him distrust the love of God. Our contemplation of this position shows us how complicated are the elements of even a single great trial; it makes us think how severe may be the elements of some great trial of our own. We thank God that he knows all, and we may rest assured that all enters into his estimation of the position of his people when they are found in the place of obedience, though the command that sent them there was inexplicable and hard.

And now, let us glance for a few moments at THE NATURE AND GRANDEUR OF THIS POSITION OF ABRAHAM AS REGARDS GOD.

He walked *in the simple obedience of faith*. He just believed, and that belief unravelled all ; or rather made him content, that all should be left unravelled ; and to that faith alone is to be attributed his "Here" — "Here am I." The power of faith is just its simplicity, — the more uncompounded, the stronger it is. Its strength lies in precisely the point which draws down upon it the sneers and mockery of carnal reason. If faith were not to act until it could reason out every point, or until it could calculate the various probabilities connected with it, then would it cease to be faith at all ; and we may rest assured that it would cease to do the deeds, and win the triumphs which belong to pure faith and to it alone.

The whole of Abraham's conduct is inexplicable, but on this supposition of faith ; it must be removed from the domain of all ordinary reasoning. He was under a command ; the command could be carried out only in the power of faith ; the faith was forthcoming and with it the obedience also.

Now, the world cannot put obedience and faith together after this fashion. Obedience is acknowledged by many to be right ; but then it must be obedience that will have many things to back it up. it is thought to be a right obedience if reason and expediency and circumstances back it up ; but it is considered fanaticism unless they do. When the child of God is pressed by such a statement as this, let

him look to Abraham. Simple faith claimed simple obedience ; it obtained it ; and in this word "Here" we have the vast result, the great testimony of its power.

May we, dear reader, be privileged to become more simple in our faith ; if only this be the case, we shall be saved unnumbered difficulties, perplexities, and trials ; we shall have guidance in circumstances which otherwise must be surrounded with obscurity ; we shall know *what to do*, even though we may not be able to satisfy every captious inquirer, as to *why it ought to be done*. We are also destined, it may be, to have opportunities presented to us from time to time, to try the simple obedience of our faith, to have our three-days' journey, to have to carry the knife and the fire,* to have to build the altar and to listen to that which is very near to flesh and blood, putting us questions to which we can give no satisfactory answer so far as reason is concerned ; which we can only attempt to answer by throwing the inquirer back upon God, as Abraham did Isaac, when he said to him, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." We may thus be kept for a season face to face with those we cannot answer, even as Abraham was with Isaac when "they went both of them *together*." Our inability to communicate satisfactorily upon the subject which absorbs our own minds and those of our friends may be no small part of our trial ; but the simple obedience of faith will carry us through if we do not seek to compound it with worldly reasonings and thoughts.

* See Appendix A.

We have a practical instance of this recorded in one of the letters of Lady Maxwell, (A.D. 1787, letter xlvii,) which may be valuable to a tried believer, as being the personal experience of a very eminent child of God. "Since I wrote to you last, outward and inward trials have increased. The tide of spiritual temptations has run so high, and the infernal powers have so harrassed me, I began to fear I should be overcome; yet, through mercy I have stood, though only by faith exclusive of joy. The former seemed sensibly strengthened, that I might endure temptation, and by it I was enabled to cleave steadfastly to Jesus; to trust in the Lord Jehovah, in whom I found everlasting strength. This was my only refuge, and I fled to it, and there abode in spite of all I feared or felt that was painful. Had I given way to evil reasoning in the smallest degree, I found I should have plunged myself into darkness and misery. It is on these very trying occasions hard work to resist it, so strong is the propensity of the human mind to call to our aid in religious matters, what we find so necessary for direction in worldly affairs; but reason, though enlightened, I find is utterly unable to extricate us out of this fascinating power of temptation, and the labyrinths of perplexity in which temptation often involves the soul. But what it could not do because of weakness, I found effected by the mighty power of simple faith. I looked to Jesus as my only hope, and though I did not obtain immediate relief, yet the happy consequences soon proved the propriety of the expedient: Jesus drew near and brought with him a heaven of peace

and love. The powers of hell and their dark suggestions, before him, fled away; and as one whom his mother comforteth, so he comforteth my soul, and has most graciously condescended again and again to repeat these heavenly visits.”

Do not deceive yourself, dear reader, by thinking that you must be removed from the ordinary course of daily life, before you can be tried in any degree after the fashion of Abraham. It is not so; the journey, the questioning, the sacrifice, may all meet you, and yet the circumstances of outward life seem but little changed. Perhaps the trial will be just a matter between you and God, as it was in Abraham's case. Sarah was left behind, the young men were left behind, there was no noise, there was no one openly to resist, even so may it be with you; the magnitude of the transaction will not in God's eyes be diminished by the fact, that it is witnessed by no earthly eyes.

But it is impossible to understand the grandeur of Abraham's position with reference to God, unless we consider also how he acted *irrespectively of visible means*. Abraham had been promised that the blessing should come through Isaac. He was nevertheless certainly about to kill that very Isaac, and with his own hand shut up the channel through which the blessing was to flow; and what position did this place him in as regards God? It threw him back as it were, upon him again; upon him, and him alone. The patriarch had to begin as it were afresh; to go back again to the old time when Isaac was not, when the promise indeed was in existence, but there was no one in whom it was embodied. The

promise remained untouched. The faith of Abraham consisted not simply in his being ready to offer this bloody sacrifice at the command of God ; no, nor in his readiness to have his own heart wrung, and his expectations disappointed. It consisted in his holding on to the promise, and to the fulfilment of the promise in that very Isaac ; even though from being, he ceased to be, and that by Abraham's own hand.

Let us pause for a moment, and see what Abraham's being thus put back so many years says to ourselves. It says, "Believer, when you think all is prosperous, you may have to go back again into a season, when all that you shall have to go upon will be the consciousness of God's love to you, and the great visible tokens of it will be removed." Yes ; it speaks to us of spiritual matters, and says, "Believer, sensible evidences of favor may be removed ; you may be called upon to walk in darkness, and see no light ; you may lose all visible comforts from God ; but you must not lose God himself, and in that belief you must live and act."

Perhaps, there is no greater trial—nothing, so to speak, more provoking—than thus to be put back. While all was expectancy, while hope gilded the future, while all was going on well, while everything good was maturing, we were happy ; but to be made bankrupt after having become rich, that is hard indeed. To get, and then to lose, is more trying far than not to have gotten at all. Each reader, even partially exercised in the divine life, will know for himself the points in which this form of trial has met him. It may have come to him in worldly things, it may

have come in spiritual, perhaps it came in both combined ; let us encourage ourselves by the example of Abraham ; let us be fully persuaded that all is not of necessity lost. In Isaac already practically dead, he saw the visible means of the consummated blessing fail ; but he was ready to see them fail ; he was ready to go back in faith, as such was the will of God.

But Abraham knew that he was only being put back, and knowing this, we can well imagine how many thoughts would rise up in his mind, — evil thoughts concerning this trying dispensation, mingling themselves with those lofty thoughts of unalterable faith. “ True,” his heart might have thought, “ Isaac, yea, this Isaac, will be restored to me again ; but after what fashion ? Shall I get him back without any loss ? Will all that has gone before go for nothing, his education, his rearing, all the surmounted trials of his infancy ? Must I in my old age, and his mother in hers, commence all this again ? Shall I live to see Isaac, who I hoped would have closed my eyes, grow up to manhood once more ? I have no guarantee for this from God.”

Abraham could not tell how God would act ; and we can imagine that flesh and blood would be very busy in their actings in such a state of uncertainty as this. We know how God restored Isaac to his father, and we know that Abraham was no loser. Can we not learn something herefrom for the strengthening of our own faith ? our past trouble is not always for nothing, because we have been put back. Even if we have to begin afresh, it is with accumulated experience, with

deeper knowledge of God ; we start from a vantage-ground in every way. It is hard to drop from our hand the tool that we have worked with so long, that seems to fit it so well, and begin all anew ; but God will not have his people wedded to the visible ; we are his scholars, and he must appoint everything as he will.

Another point in Abraham's action of faith, irrespective of the visible means, is seen in the fact that *he had no nucleus to recommence with*. There was absolutely no starting point from which to set out. Soon there would be upon the altar a handful of ashes, — the remnants of his beloved child ; and what could he do with them ? This was enough to bewilder Abraham ; this it was that threw him back entirely upon God. Had the patriarch something left with which to begin afresh, — had he even the unburned body of his child, — it would have been different ; but everything was to be taken from him, the body of Isaac was to be reduced to ashes ; what was there left upon which man could in any way act ?

Now, it is very seldom that we are reduced to such extremities as this. We have generally some handful left in the barrel, some drop in the cruse. We think it much, and no doubt it is much, to act in faith on these ; but what is it to act in faith on nothing at all ? Should we be reduced to the direst straits in body or soul, may we remember this phase of Abraham's faith ; may we encourage ourselves in it, may we have grace to contemplate calmly this destitution of earthly means of reconstruction, even as Abraham did. Well indeed may we say, " May we have grace ; "

for this is unquestionably a fearful trial — one that severs joints and marrow — one that discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart ; and nothing but grace, the same grace that Abraham had, and as much of it also, will carry us through.

But suppose that Abraham had a nucleus left to him, — that the life had merely been taken from Isaac, and that his body unburned were left upon the altar, — what could Abraham do with it ? He had no instrumentality with which to work ; no healing herb would restore the life ; no warm breathing upon the cold clay would recall the spirit ; all that he could do would be to look at the dead body of his child, or, it may be, in speechless agony, bestow upon it the passionate but unavailing tokens of a father's love.

So, then, from beginning to end, the patriarch was thrown on God ; and this action of his, this all-but consummated sacrifice, in the face of these difficulties, only brings forth more clearly how great was the extent of his faith. Shall not we, dear reader, try in our measure and do likewise ? We may have nothing to work upon in such and such an one, whom we would have brought into life eternal ; we may have no instrumentality wherewith to reach them ; yea, even in our own hearts, we may find that utter nothingness to good, which tells us that if such and such a virtue is to be wrought in us, it must be of God alone : then let it be of God ; and let us not be disheartened because we can see no starting point. If by grace we trust God, he will not be wanting to our faith, but will do all by his own amazing power. Yea, let us not forget our earthly concerns, for much

of our spiritual action is displayed in them, and much of God's mighty action also; in them, too, we may be brought very low; we may seem to be shut up from the means of helping ourselves; but faith must rest upon the One who calleth "things that are not as though they were," and pass through this terrible vacuum to God himself.* Amen! may we have grace to possess some measure of Abraham's faith, should we be called upon in any measure to share his trial.

Thus we have seen how Abraham walked in the simple obedience of faith, and how he acted irrespective of the visible means; now let us glance at *his action in the realization of God's character.*

Abraham knew with whom he had to deal; he knew his faithfulness, and he trusted it. God would be true to himself; and in so being, Abraham knew that He must be true to him. Now, in thus realizing God's faithfulness, Abraham obtained a great portion of that power by which he was enabled at the altar of sacrifice to say, "'Here' am I." There was intelligence in the patriarch's faith; he looked

* This is what God would have his servant Baruch also to do, in the midst of the deepest calamity and distress. He confirms all that scribe's gloomy anticipations; but he gives him something to repose on for safety, in the midst of them all. That something is simply his own plighted word, upon which Baruch must trust. God knew all Baruch's trouble. "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch; Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest. Thus shalt thou say unto him, the Lord saith thus" (and how much are we taught by the bringing together of this, "Thou didst say," and "The Lord saith thus,") "Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not; for, behold! I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey, in all places whither thou goest." (Jer. xlv.) Through all-surrounding gloom must Baruch pass, and repose upon the Lord himself.

down, if we might so express ourselves, into the roots of the being of God.

This is a matter of the utmost importance. The apostle felt it to be so when he said, "I know in whom I have believed." (2 Tim. i. 12.) Yea, the Lord himself declares it to be so, for he puts this knowledge above all that man holds most precious. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." (Jer. ix. 23, 24.) "The people," says Daniel, (xi. 32,) "that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits."

Abraham knew God in his faithfulness; he had pledged his word; and as soon as his word had gone forth, his character came into action; Abraham fell back, not simply on the word which came forth from God, but upon God himself. The patriarch could not imagine a particle of untruth in the character of his God; therefore he rested upon him in the abstract, as a faithful one, who must, from a very necessity of his nature, carry out his word. Now, this is a matter of immense importance to us. Are we acting, or prepared to act, in the simple belief of the faithfulness of God? Have we tried so to acquaint ourselves with him, that in the failure of all that is outward, we may be at peace simply in him? Do we hear God saying, "I am the Lord; I change

not?" (Mal. iii. 6.) "I am the Lord" — do we know anything of the meaning of those words? If we do not, what will become of us when we, in our measure, are called upon to take up the position of the patriarch? The great prop of faith will be removed; the wall against which we might have set our back, and defied all our enemies, will appear to us to have fallen; and we shall come miserably to the ground. All things change their aspects here below; (what could be a greater change than that which appeared to have taken place in the prospects of Isaac?) but God himself is unchanged; and upon that unchangeableness only can we go.

How vaguely do we think of God in the manifold trials of our daily life! In all vagueness there is weakness; in all concentration, all particularity, there is power; there cannot be vagueness, without more or less of uncertainty; and there cannot be uncertainty, without more or less of instability. Definite notions beget definite actions; and, it may be added, they bring definite glory to God.

God is assuredly greatly glorified by us, when we, like Abraham, act in the specific realization of his character; when we contemplate him upon every scene: a living, active God, — a God who will act according to his own nature; and as such he may be glorified by us in our daily life; only to thus glorify him we must know him. Think, then, dear reader, into this great subject; think, not only of God in his acts, but of God in himself. You may be brought into such circumstances as are not easily made comfortable by known precedents of God's acting;

but you cannot be brought into any circumstances, which are not made comfortable or bearable by the the known character of God himself. God's actings may vary, but God himself never does ; that Abraham knew ; and what was a tower of strength to him may be the like to us.

And let us seek to know God, not merely in one or two, but in all his attributes ; for, if we do not, we shall probably stumble at many of his dispensations. Abraham knew that the one he served was not only faithful to desire and intend to fulfil his promises, but that he was also wise, knowing how it was to be done, and powerful, able to work out all that his knowledge knew. Abraham knew that he had to deal with one " who calleth those things that be not, as though they were " (Rom. iv. 17) ; he was " fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform." (Rom. iv. 21.) This realization of God enabled the patriarch to stand in a proper position toward him ; it brought him to that testing altar-side ; it enabled him to say, " ' Here ' am I." Abraham must be our schoolmaster here. A comprehensive view of God can alone insure us comprehensive peace ; failure in any one point will assuredly bring us into a false position, as regards that one point towards God. Satan will try us there, and through that joint in our harness will shoot his fiery dart. It is when we know God perfect in his faithfulness, goodness, knowledge, power, love, and all else that make up his character, that we shall have a faith in him which turns every way, and meets the enemy at every point of the compass.* Abraham, in point of

* Appendix B.

fact, said, "He has pledged his word, and he must, I know, be faithful to it; he must know how to perform what he promised; and he must have the means of doing it." Abraham knew too much of God to think that he could come short either through ignorance or impotence; he simply credited him for being what he is; and that enabled him to occupy towards him the grand position that he did.

And now, dear reader, when times of great trial come on us, may we just give God credit for being what he is,—that is all that he asks from us; it is true he cannot ask more; but it is equally true he cannot ask less. He asks us to make him all in all to us, just in order that he may become so. In fact, God says, "Be rich in me; take to yourself in me all the resources which it is possible for a man to have. You need not be distracted by looking at the various aspects of events; look at me,—act, or live, (as the case may be) in realization of me."—"On let me go," said Henry Martyn, as he approached the shores of India, "smiling at my foes; how small are human obstacles before this mighty Lord!" And if only we can act in this spirit, and in this knowledge which God would have us to possess of himself we shall be firm in endurance, energetic in action, and calm in unruffled peace. There may be an altar upon the scene; there may be an Isaac upon that altar; but an Abraham's faith will be all-sufficient as far as earth is concerned, and a Jehovah's character as far as heaven. No storied book written by human hand shall chronicle the altar-scene; but it shall be found enrolled in the archives of heaven; for "they

which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."

There is one point more of interest, upon which it will be well to touch before we conclude, and *i. e.* :—

How came Abraham to fill this wonderful position toward God,—a position which has made him worthy of being considered "as the Father of the Faithful"?

We have two answers to give to this question : one is, because he was in covenant ; the other, because he was taught.

There existed a solemn relationship between Abraham and God. That relationship was one of covenant. When first he started from his country and kindred, and father's house, to go, he knew not whither, but simply to "a land that God would show him ;" then God made on his part a solemn promise to him : "I will make of thee a great nation ; and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing ; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee ; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. xii. 1–3.) It is true that in chap. xv. we meet with Abraham in a desponding, if not a doubting condition ; for he says, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus ? And Abraham said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and, lo ! one born in mine house is mine heir," and, again, we meet with failure in the matter of Hagar, in chap. xvi. ; but God renews his promise to him

in chap. xvii. and declares that he will make a covenant with him, and that covenant is to be fulfilled, on God's part, in Isaac. True! even here Abraham failed again; but God passed by the faithlessness of his servant, and declared that "Sarah his wife should bear a son indeed:" "and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget; and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac."

We may observe, in passing, how great was the condescension of the Lord—how great his long-suffering in vouchsafing to make use of this word "indeed." He, the Fountain of all truth, was doubted; and that, by the most believing man on earth. What an offence to the divine majesty! How amply would it have justified him in withdrawing from Abraham altogether! But it is not thus he acts; he knoweth that we are but dust, he condescends to confirm his word, he, the Fountain of all truth, uses the word "indeed."

And, again, we may observe his gentleness and patience in dealing with Abraham in the matter of Ishmael. What presumption was it in Abraham to propose that Ishmael might live before God (Gen. xvii. 18); what belief, what interference with God's plans, what a proposing to him of a better way of carrying out his intentions, than the one his infinite

wisdom had designed and announced! What a wanting God to go back of his word, and take the means ready at hand, in the person of Ishmael, instead of waiting in admiration upon him to carry out in his own way his own will! What a preference of the seen to the unseen in the way of instrumentality, and what a putting up with the lower, when God promises the higher; being satisfied with the son of the bondwoman, when the lord was going to give him a son of the freewoman, — even of his wife Sarah!

And, yet, how does the all-merciful Lord deal with his failing servant? He does not say, “Because thou hast offended me, in putting Ishmael before me with such an unbelieving heart, I will cut him off, and so punish thee in him;” but in great tenderness to Abraham’s relationship of a father to Ishmael, he guarantees this son also *a* blessing, though not *the* blessing: “And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee.” Oh! the wonders of divine condescension and pity; as though God said, “I recognize the feelings of a father in thee; great as thou art in faith, thou art only flesh and blood; I will not deal with thee after thy short-coming, but after mine own faithfulness and mercy.”

And we find God afterwards honoring Abraham in this same Ishmael, and promising him, even under the most unlikely circumstances, that this son shall have a great blessing, because of his relationship to his believing servant. Ishmael is now about to be sent away; nothing but the wilderness lay before him; Abraham is in bitter distress *because* of the lad, and *because* of his bondwoman; and these two “*be-*

causes " God meets with another *because* : " Of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, *because* he is thy seed." Ishmael's being Abraham's seed would have been no reason to *man*, but it was to *God*; and it just shows us how he will honor all those who try to honor him, even though there may be partial failure in their effort.

Mark also, dear reader, the " And," — And also of the son of the bondwoman, etc. The covenant was to be fulfilled in Isaac, but God did not exhaust himself in that ; he has the blessing of the upper and the nether springs, both, at his command ; he can feed the multitudes so that they not only eat, but are filled ; and do it so bountifully, that baskets full of fragments remain. He can bless Abraham in the lesser as well as in the greater ; yea, he can bless him in everything, and every person belonging to him. Man might have thought, God has exhausted himself in Isaac ; but not so, there was something for Ishmael also, " because " he was Abraham's seed.

Is there not much teaching for us, if we will ponder these dealings of the Lord with Abraham ? Are not we hereby encouraged to trust him for full blessing ; to believe in the largeness and universality of his goodness and liberality ; to serve and honor him who is so graciously pleased to honor us ? " Them that honor me, I will honor," are the words of God ; and it might be added, they are the experience of his saints. Let us not be afraid that we shall be losers by allowing God to work out his own counsel, in his own way ; He can bless Ishmael after his manner as well as Isaac. May we never confound our blessings,

because they come from one and the same source ; and are conferred on us as one and the same individual. God specifies what Ishmael was, even in the very act of promising this blessing, also of “ the son of the bondwoman.” Yes, we must receive all blessings in their proper place ; the higher and the lower ; our rejoicing must be in the covenant blessing, though we may be soothed and comforted, and made easy in mind, by blessings of a lower stamp, and conferred upon lower interests.

But we have already digressed enough. Although this subject would naturally lead us much farther on, let us now return to our brief consideration of how it came to pass that Abraham was able to fill this grand and wonderful position as regards God.

We observed that the first great cause was the fact of his being in covenant with him.

The position of covenant is always one of power. When we say “ always,” we must so far qualify the word as to add, *when it is realized*, and *in proportion as it is realized* ; for, through want of civilization we, so far as we are concerned, may become powerless altogether.

The position of covenant with God, when realized, must be full of power, for it acts on the whole man. If a man feels himself in covenant, how strong he is in *prayer* ! He knows the One to whom he goes ; he knows that he is his friend, pre-disposed to hear him, bound by his own gracious arrangement so to do ; the enmity between God and man is removed ; the petitioner has taken God to be his God, and God has taken the petitioner to be his child ; and so the man prays

in the power, and, it might be added, in the peace, of covenant relationship. How strong, also, is he in *expectation*! He knows that he has a right to look for blessing from God, — “a right,” because his Father has been pleased to give him the right; “a blessing,” — how, when, and where that Father wills. The man, in realization of covenant, starts with an immense advantage over all others. He knows from the outset that God will certainly be gracious to him. Then there is *action*! If a man knows that he is in God’s appointed way, and doing God’s appointed work, and that he is in covenant with God, that God will never leave him nor forsake him, then he becomes nerved for action as Abraham was, when, knife in hand, he stood beside that altar, and said, “‘Here’ am I.” Thus was it with Nehemiah; he called upon God to remember the words that he had commanded Moses, saying, “If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations; but if ye turn unto me and keep my commandments, and do them, though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.” Then he said, “Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power and thy strong hand. O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants who desire to fear thy name; and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” And Nehemiah was prospered; and in the full assurance that the hand of the

Lord was with him, he had an answer ready for Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, saying, "The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build." (Nehemiah, chaps. i, ii.) God had on his part bound himself by a promise, and Nehemiah on his part came into the conditions of the promise; and so, even in the most difficult of circumstances, he was ready to act.

Then take the matter of *endurance*. It is generally more easy to act than to endure, to be energetic than to be patient; the fire of the furnace and the solitude of the lions' den would be, to most persons at least, more trying than the conflict with Goliath, or the standing before Cæsar. How strong were servants of God under these very circumstances in olden times! When Nebuchadnezzar's furnace was all ready, when the *same hour* those who would not worship his golden image were to be cast into it, the answer of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, was prompt and decided, they were ready at once to act for God, to be put into the furnace; and should it be God's pleasure that they were to suffer there, for that also they were ready, they could speak of our God, "Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from this burning, fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king; but if not," — then they were prepared to suffer that God's will, as well as to do it, — "be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." (Dan. iii. 17, 18.)

Yes ; the position of realized covenant is one of power ; (1) it gives a man a living interest in the attributes of God, (2) it makes a man sure of the good will of God towards him in the commands that he gives him, (3) it makes him realize his own position as one bound in obedience. What we have to do, or to bear, may be hard, but the remembrance of these three points will help to enable us for it. God himself comes on the scene to help us ; murmuring and distrustful thoughts are quelled ; our position as bound to obedience is realized. We can meet with no circumstances in life in which these considerations will not prove of force ; indeed, if allowed to put forth their full power, they will, by God's grace, carry us through every emergency which may meet us in the life, either of the body or the soul.

It is easy to trace in Scripture how this relationship with God underlies the energies or the patience of many of his people ; but we must pass beyond all these, to see covenant relationship in its full force. There was one who said : " Before Abraham was, I am ; " and it is of him we write. The one who stood in closest covenant relationship with God was his own well-beloved Son, and he also was the one who realized most truly what being in covenant really was. He is the head of all covenant-keepers ; the perfect one in whom, and in whom alone, in this as in all else, there was no failure. The obedience of Christ, *as* man, was a covenanted obedience *for* man ; the death of Christ, *as* man, was a covenant death for man ; the reward of Christ *as* the man Christ Jesus, was a covenant reward, which he obtained for him-

self; and not only for himself, but for us. The perfection of covenant-keeping — the vast results of it — appear in him.

Let us not be misunderstood. We can enter into no covenant of works with God, but we can into a covenant of grace; by that covenant God graciously condescends to become bound to us, and we may rest assured that what is of his mere grace is fully as binding as anything could be that was secured by our having fulfilled a stipulated condition. Grace binds us to obedience, with a stronger bond than law. "Shall we sin," asks the apostle, "because we are not under the law, but under grace?" The answer is, "God forbid." Yes, we also say, God forbid that grace should not bind us to loving obedience, — that we should not feel the sweet compulsion of love, at least as strongly as others do the stern compulsion of law. The love of Christ constraineth us; yes, with a constraint, which, because it is love's, we do not wish to contend against, but to yield to. We may rest assured that the place of obedience will be always best filled by the man that is most realizing the power of the covenant of grace; from his lips will there most readily come this wondrous "Here;" by the altar of self-sacrifice he will be found; and the words which he will utter are those of the father of the faithful, "Here am I."

One great secret of Abraham's noble position lies in the fact that *he had given himself to God*. This he had done when he left his native land and his father's house, and wandered forth, he knew not whither, but simply to go to some land which God

would show him. When he gave himself up to God, he gave all ; the greater sacrifice included all lesser ones ; he felt he was no longer his own ; having taken the Lord as his God, he had to go whither He would, and be ruled simply by what He said.

Can we not see what an immense source of power this must have been to the patriarch. No self-considerations were now allowed to interfere with his obedience ; self does not appear at this altar-side ; Abraham stands face to face, as it were, with God. It is short-coming in this respect, dear reader, that is so often a source of our weakness in trial times. This is the clay that mingles with the iron, so that its strength becomes impaired ; and it fails, where nothing but iron determination can succeed. Most of the short-comings of God's people can be traced to incomings of "self" in some form ; in proportion as this "self" is subdued, do we become equal either to great effort or great endurance for God. St. Paul had this crucifixion of "self ;" what things were gain to him, those he counted loss for Christ ; yea, doubtless, he counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ his Lord, for whom he had suffered the loss of all things, and did count them but dung that he might win Christ. (Phil. iii. 7, 8.) Yea, St. Paul's Master and great Example had the same spirit ; as He had the greatest of all works to do, so he had to crucify self the most. "He made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto

death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. ii. 7, 9.) Christ's crucifixion of "self" from the commencement, even before he hung upon Calvary, was one great source of his power; it put aside the crown, unbought with blood, which the Jews would have given him; it would not allow the fire from heaven to fall when the Samaritans insulted him; he came, not to destroy life, but to save it; and he could only do this by the crucifixion of himself.

If we look back to our past failures, we shall doubtless be able to trace "self" more or less in them all. Some considerations of "self" made us do what we should not have done, and made us leave undone what we should have done. "Self" comes between us and our work, even as it does between us and our God. Like the poor Indian, we will give up everything before "self;" and yet the giving up of "self" to God is everything indeed. The story of this poor Indian is full of teaching for us; he was a chief, belonging to the Ojibways, near Owen's Sound, Lake Huron; was a poor pagan, and lived, prior to the civilized condition now witnessed, amongst a remnant of that once powerful tribe, reduced at present to about one thousand souls, embracing parts of other tribes also. He was noted for his strong and noble frame, his fearlessness in danger, and his remarkable success in the chase.

It so happened, whilst yet a young man, with a wife and family surrounding him, he left the camp of his people, and retired a considerable distance from them, for the purpose of hunting. Shortly after reaching this new place of abode, the supply of

provisions having been exhausted, he went forth as formerly in quest of game, but soon discovered his former good fortune had deserted him ; the animals, as if apprised of his intentions, retiring to a safe distance out of gun-shot. Foiled in his purpose, he renewed his exertions, only to find failure attending every attempt. Discouraged, after long and persevering efforts, remembering, too, his isolated condition, and the imperative needs of his family, who had now been driven nearly to starvation, so that they had to live for more than three days on wild roots, he paused, weary and faint, and taking a seat upon a log, out of sight, but so that he could hear his little children playing, he fell into a train of meditation. He looked upward to the blue arch above him, and beheld the beautiful sky and the bright sun ; and casting his eyes around him he saw the green grass, the waving trees, and the flowing water ; and, as he thought of the silvery moon and the shining stars, he said to himself, " These things came not here by their own bidding ; there must be a *cause* for them. They could not produce themselves, and, therefore, they must have been created ; and who is their creator ? Surely he must be the Great Spirit ! and I wish that Great Spirit would bless the poor Indian, that his famishing wife and children might not starve." Then he thought that perhaps he must give the Great Spirit something, so that he would bless him. And what had he ? There was his blanket ; though it had done him good service, and was sorely needed, he would give it up if He would bless him. So he took the blanket in his hands, and

laid it on the log, and with upturned eyes said, "Here, Great Spirit, accept this blanket, and bless poor Indian, that he may find food, that his wife and children may not starve." The anguish in his bosom is unabated. No manna fell from heaven to afford relief. The offering did not suffice. What was he now to do? A tomahawk hangs in his belt. Could he spare that? Yes; if that was what the Great Spirit required, he thought he could. He advances as before, and laid it on the log, and said, "Oh! Great Spirit, take my tomahawk. It is all poor Indian has. He has nothing else to give. Take it, and bless me, and give me food for my children." But, alas! no answer comes. The burden rests upon his bosom still. And what could he do now? There was his gun, his only means of obtaining game, his sole support, and hitherto unfailing friend. How could he spare that? Must he part with that, also? He paused; but, pressed down by his forlorn condition, almost hopeless, he knew of no other extremity worse than his present condition. Solemnly the gun was laid on the log, and he sobbed out, "Oh! Great Spirit, take my gun, too. It is all poor Indian has. He has nothing more. Take it, and bless poor Indian, that his wife and children may not starve." Still the messenger of love came not. Almost broken-hearted, he suddenly started to his feet. A ray of light had flashed through his soul! He would go to that rude altar again, and offer *himself* up to the Great Spirit! So he sat down on the log with his blanket, tomahawk, and gun by his side, and said, "Here, Great

Spirit, poor Indian has given up all that he has ; he has nothing more ; so take *poor Indian too*, and bless him, that he may find food for his famishing family that they may not starve." In a moment a change comes over the scene, and everything seems smiling and joyous. His soul is filled with happiness ; and as he contemplates, lo ! a deer comes bounding towards him from the thicket. He raised his gun, and secured him ! Thus was his prayer answered. He was ever after successful in hunting ; game was abundant ; and the Great Spirit had all the praise. Returning to his family he told them all that had happened ; and thinking that, if he left the blanket, tomahawk, and gun upon the log, they could be of no use to any one, he took them with him, and told the Great Spirit that he would take care of them for him, and use them subject to his will. The hunting season being over, he returned to his tribe and people ; and on hearing for the first time the teaching of a missionary, whilst seated with his red brethren and sisters, and listening attentively to the words of the speaker, as he told them how they must give themselves up to Christ, and, remembering how similar had been his own situation when alone in the forest, he could contain himself no longer, but sprang upon his feet, and shouted, " Yes, that's me, that's me." He then related to those assembled the above narrative. He was ever after a pious Christian.

He had never learned to read, but could spell out the words contained in his Bible, and could remember large portions of it. When he was at a loss to understand a text, he would go to the Great Spirit,

whom he declared made known to him the meaning; and when it had thus been revealed to him, he was prepared to expound it to others.

In the midst of his usefulness in the service of God, who had so manifested himself to him, he was called from works to rewards. His zeal for the promotion of the gospel by the teachings of the Holy Spirit terminated only with his life.

The teaching which God gave this poor Indian is precisely that which he, in some form or other, gives to all his people. He says, "My son, give me thine heart." "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are his." God has purchased "self," therefore all which makes up a man must be freely his. And, from thoughts of our poor selves, our minds may turn to God's glorious self. The apostle grounds his argument of the fulness of God's gifts to his people, upon the fact that he has first given them himself,—himself in his Son, Christ Jesus; "He that spared not his only Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. viii. 32.) This is a blessed thought; and may the power which we are taught there is in God's giving himself to us teach us the power that there will be in our giving ourselves to him.

The fact, then, of Abraham's being in covenant with God was one great reason of his being able to occupy this position by the altar-side. There was another reason also; and, that is, because *he had been a man taught of God.*

The patriarch had received various teachings from the Lord. God had given him various promises, and allowed intervals to elapse between them. Those intervals were educational. God teaches by times and seasons, as well as by words and deeds. The rapidity of his dealings, the apparent tardiness of them; his action following quickly upon his word; his tarrying until his people seemed almost inclined to say, "But, Thou, O Lord, how long?" all these are calculated to have their own peculiar influences upon the individuals with whom God is dealing, if only they have their eyes open to see the Lord in everything.

Those intervals during which the faith of Abraham was tried — during which, however, he was sustained by renewed promises — were eminently calculated to operate upon his character, in fact, to mature this faith, the great culminating point of which is to be found here by the altar-side. God saw in this wonderful and final act of faith, the fruit of his own teaching during previous years. It is with us as it was with the Father of the Faithful. All the intervals, be they longer or shorter, which God allows to elapse between his promises and their performance are only so many lessons for his people's faith. And this is one great use which we are to make of delays when we recall them to our minds. At the time, they were very trying; natural impatience, natural desire at once to seize the good, or emerge from evil, sorely tried the heart; but all this time God said, "Stay thyself on me;" yes; all that he gave us was a further confirmed promise from himself, — more, as it were,

of himself; and thus our faith was trained and strengthened; until at last it brought forth glorious fruit.

We have not yet passed beyond the dispensation of intervals and delays. We have still "in our patience to possess our souls;" every waiting time is a heart-schooling time, and something good ought to come out of it hereafter. Thus God teaches; and let us remember that in general it is only taught men — whether they be instructed in this, or some other way — who can do great things in the spiritual life.

Let us take one more point in which Abraham was taught; it will serve as an example of how God manifested himself to him in the events of his daily life. The case to which we allude is that of Abimelech, or that of Pharaoh. In these cases God taught the patriarch the evil of duplicity; in each of them he depended on subtlety and human wisdom, and not on God; and he would certainly have come off badly had not the Lord helped him. God was indeed better to him than he would have been to himself. All that he hoped to do was to save his life; God saved his life, and preserved his wife to him also. God here taught him his own power to help; and, moreover, he showed him his jealousy on behalf of the interests of his people; all of which, no doubt, had its influence on the patriarch's mind.

But we need not dwell longer here, as we shall have to consider this matter more fully elsewhere. There were, doubtless, many daily teachings during Abraham's long life; we see to how high a point of attainment they led him; and we can well conceive

that He who knew all things had that point before his mind when he thus led his servant on. Does not a voice address itself to us, and say, "Let no teaching of passing events be lost, be those events God's special mercies, or thine own shortcomings, or both combined, — learn from all, and let God be glorified by all?"

Yes, dear reader; here, as everywhere else in our consideration of Holy Scripture, practical questions force themselves upon our minds.

Does not this voice from the altar-side say to us, Where art thou at this present time? Art thou so pleased with any blessing, that, at a plain word from God, thou wilt not let it go?

Has God no speech so plain, but that thou, Balaam-like, must hear something, even plainer still, before thou wilt understand what he meaneth?

Dost thou yield, without questioning and debate, taking, in all things, the revelation of God's will as an answer to all questionings, a queller of all murmurings, and a solver of all doubts?

Art thou leaving consequences with God, saying, "Obedience is mine, consequences are his?"

And, even if we be, as it were, in the place of sacrifice; ready, with knitted brow and lip compressed, to hear, or even to *do*, the will of God; still, are we, like Abraham, in the place of *worship*; adoring, as well as obeying, with a consecrated heart? Ah! this is a testing question, indeed; this is a true glorifying of God even in the fires; this is not only saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away," but adding also, "blessed be the name of the

Lord." We tremble when we think how much this may call for from us ; but He who enabled Abraham, who was but flesh and blood, for the performance of his hard task, can also enable us, so that we shall at once adore and obey ; glorifying God with both our bodies and our spirits which are his.

How touching is John Newton's adoration and obedience under a complication of the deepest trial, — widowhood, blindness, old age, the loss of one needful companion by death, and the sudden abstraction of another by illness. "After the death of Miss Cunningham and Mrs. Newton, his companion in his summer excursions was his other niece, Miss Elizabeth Catlett. This young lady had also been brought up by Mr. and Mrs. Newton with Miss Cunningham ; and on the death of the two latter, she became the object of Mr. Newton's naturally affectionate disposition. She also became quite necessary to him by her administrations in his latter years ; she watched him, walked with him, and visited wherever he went ; when his sight failed she read to him, divided his food, and was unto him all that a dutiful daughter could be. But in the year 1801 a nervous disorder seized her, by which Mr. Newton was obliged to submit to her being separated from him. During the twelvemonth it lasted, the weight of the affliction, added to his weight of years, seemed to overwhelm him. A few of his reflections on the occasion, written on some blank leaves in an edition of his "Letters to a Wife," will possess some interest.

"*August 1st, 1801.*— I now enter my seventy-seventh year. I have been exercised this year with a

trying and unexpected change ; but it is by Thy appointment, my gracious Lord, and thou art unchangeably wise, good, and merciful. Thou gavest me my dear adopted child. Thou didst own my endeavors to bring her up for thee. I have no doubt that thou hast called her by thy grace. I thank thee for the many years' comfort I have had in her, and for the attention and affection she has always shown me, exceeding that of most daughters to their own parents. Thou hast now tried me as thou didst Abraham in his old age, when my eyes are failing, and my strength declines. Thou hast called for my Isaac, who had so long been my chief stay and staff ; but it was thy blessing that made her so. A nervous disorder has seized her, and I desire to leave her under thy care, and chiefly pray for myself, that I may be enabled to wait thy time and will without betraying any sign of impatience or despondency unbecoming my profession and character. Hitherto thou hast helped me, and to thee I look for help in future. Let all issue in thy glory, that my friends and hearers may be encouraged by seeing how I am supported ; let thy strength be manifested in my weakness, and thy grace be sufficient for me, and let all finally work together for our good. Amen ! I am to say from my heart, " Not my will, but thine, be done." But though thou hast in a measure made my spirit willing, thou knowest, and I feel, that the flesh is weak. " Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief." Lord, I submit. Subdue every rebellious thought that dares arise against thy will. Spare my eyes if it please thee, but, above all, strengthen my faith and love."

It may give the reader pleasure to be informed that Miss Catlett returned home, gradually recovered, and afterwards married a worthy and respectable member of Mr. Newton's congregation.

Let us remember that there are trials for us in the points in which we can be tried; we all have our vital points, and God knows well what they are. Sodom was comparatively but little trial to Abraham; he could freely resign to Lot all the richly-watered and well-favored plain; but, ah! when it came to Isaac, then the arrow flew swift and straight to his very heart; and well it might, for he who aimed it was the Lord. We, when we are suffering under our trials, say, "Oh! if it were only so-and-so." Does not this very fact of our choosing "so-and-so" show us that that would not have been *such* a trial to us. We may spare ourselves such vain wishes; if God means to try us, it will be in some point where he knows we shall feel.

And, now, what lesser sacrifices to which we are called are we making? In what habit of life are we living? What habit of mind are we cultivating? Oh! may our life be such that we be not altogether unprepared should God point out a Moriah to us, and bid us take our Isaac there.

Are we willing to do—to be—to go—to stay—as God directs? Are we willing to have no will but God's, and to have that? Should it please him that we are to have much to do for him, are we willing to do it? At each call of service are we ready, or do we wish to be ready, to say, "Here am I?" He who follows the example of Abraham must be

prepared for anything, and at any time, and in any place. It may be that we have not attained to this; but are we earnestly desiring to do so? The God of Abraham sees our desires, and knows whether they be good seed, likely to bring forth good fruit; and if they be, he will cherish them, and be glorified in us, as he was in the Father of the Faithful. Let us beware of half-heartedness, if we would follow in the steps of Abraham. We know not in how many places, or before how many persons, or at how many times we shall be called upon to say, "Here am I;" and it may be that Satan will tempt us, and say, "You are being tried too often: you have too much to do and to suffer for the Lord;" and nothing will enable us to meet that temptation but the implicit obedience of faith; the being determined to give utterance to the words before us, wholly irrespective of the circumstances in which we are placed. Oh! that we could take up, and make our own, those deep words of Henry Martyn, "To have a will of my own, not agreeable to God's, is a most tremendous wickedness. I own it is so, for a few moments; but, Lord, write it on my heart! In perfect meekness and resignation, let me take whatever befalls me in the path of duty, and never dare to think of being dissatisfied."

And if we are placed in the midst of very active work for God, are we ready to say, "Here am I," if we be suddenly called from one branch of it to another? How often this makes us impatient and fretful; how fruitful a source is it of sin in the mind, even though there be service in the body. The peo-

ple of God often miss blessing, in this particular kind of failure: their "Here am I" is said with somewhat of a sulky spirit; and a sulky spirit is unmeet for blessing. Let us remember that God is to be the judge of what is fittest for us to be occupied on, and that the smallest sphere is enough to afford standing room for the altar of sacrifice, and for the feet of him, who can truly say, "Here am I."

Let us turn also, for a moment, to another and opposite phase of obedience and faith. Are we willing to have apparently nothing to do for God? The more active our natural temperament, the more true our love to God, the more searching does this question become. The highest form of obedience is not necessarily that of action; it may be a keener trial to a man to be told not to do anything, than to do much. Should it please the Lord, dear reader, to appoint this as the trial of your faith, may he give you grace to see distinctly his hand, to hear distinctly his voice, and then lovingly and obediently to conform yourself thereto. Only let us be sure that we do hear God distinctly in this matter; and then, that all-important point settled, let us conform at once to his revealed will, in all love, willingness, and faith. We must say, "Here am I," whether it be in the bed, or on the sofa, or moving about with feeble and tottering steps; or, it may be, in full health, but with our way blocked up by providential dispensations; with full confidence that we are thus shut up by the Lord's hand, and that action is not what is now required of us. And God will be honored by this faith; he will see that we are wholly at his disposal; that we are

ready to go, if he say "go;" to stay, if he say "stay;" that it matters not what he says to us, we are ready for it all. And surely this is what becomes us most. Is not God the best judge of what will glorify himself? If his making the way open for us to act would be more for his glory than his shutting us up from action, would not he thus open it? for surely his glory is dearer to him than it is to us. It was Abraham's faith that honored God; and there is faith here; and many a loving, trusting, willing one, shut up from acting for God, may survey the narrow bounds within which he is circumscribed, and say, not gloomily and despondingly, but cheerfully and even joyfully, "Here am I."

Another question which might be profitably put is this, "Am I willing to remain in a state of protracted uncertainty, if such appear to be the Lord's will; to say of such a state, when it is manifestly God's will that I should be found in it, "Here am I?"

God's people have often been brought into this condition. Let us look at one instance, in the case of Daniel Wilson, the late Bishop of Calcutta, while the question of his appointment was pending. "The thought first entered my mind on Dec. 11th; I cannot tell how or why. I felt in my heart a great desire to dedicate myself to this missionary bishopric, if the Lord would accept me. This desire was kindled in my mind on the Sunday evening in prayer, and has continued since. I trust it was suggested by the Holy Spirit. Since that time the pain, the waiting, the longing of spirit which I have felt is indescribable. God, thou knowest my heart and my

desire. Accept the wish to serve thee, and be glorified in me, whether by life or death."

Will the reader recall to memory the little chapel at Homerton, and read the aspirations kindled in the soul of Daniel Wilson, as he kneels there at his first communion; and he will then perceive the perfect identity of his character. The interval of thirty-four years might almost be obliterated, and the feelings of 1797 be linked to those of 1832. Upon the same sacred day, the same desire for missionary work springs up. It is followed by restlessness, anxiety, and longing, in both cases. He is powerless himself, and hindered by others. Delay chastens his mind and subdues his will; and then, at once, obstacles of all kinds give way, and his course is made plain. Surely this is of the Lord, who is "wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

The extracts will now follow in their order of dates:—

"*Jan. 10th, 1832.*—Another day of uncertainty has passed. On conversing with Mr. Marshall this evening, we agreed in thinking that I had done nothing to regret; that every step I had taken was the result of duty towards God. We have been praying together again for light and guidance; and I feel a comfortable persuasion that God will not withhold that guidance and that light.

"*Jan. 12th.*—I have heard nothing. I have been particularly agitated and stricken in spirit through the night and through this day. I cannot account for this anxiety. It is neither reasonable nor Christian, but weak and disqualifying. I fear it is the ef

fect of pride, vanity, and self-consideration. O Lord! undertake for me. May I have no will but thine. May I wait the declaration of thy will with patience. May I be willing to know nothing till thou declarest thy pleasure.

“*Jan. 13th.* — Another day of uncertainty has passed; but my mind has been more calm and composed; perhaps the result of active duty and lapse of time. . . . I trust I may say that every day of delay, my mind becomes more weaned and quieted; and the composure of my judgment is restored.”

It is for this purpose of weaning and quieting the mind, amongst others, that God allows his people to experience the trial of uncertainty. What a good effect it had in the case before us, we may see from one or two further extracts from the same diary: —

“*Jan. 22d.* — And now, Lord, I would solemnly resign myself to thee, and implore thy gracious guidance in the circumstances as they arise. Lord, if it be not thy will, carry me not up hence. If these exercises of mind are only to humble and empty me of self, and to prepare me for more faithful labor in my present station, then, Lord, send out some one else, and qualify him for the undertaking, and dispose all events for his going out. I would here engage myself to unreserved submission, yea, to thankfulness, if I am hindered by any obstacle from going forth contrary to thy will. But, notwithstanding, if it should be thy will to accept my sacrifice, and to qualify me for the work, thy will be done. Oh, give me humility, contrition of soul,

sense of responsibility, and watchfulness over constitutional infirmities!

“*March 4th.* — Islington Church, Sunday. — Blessed Lord, I am now about to partake of thy body as broken, and to drink thy blood as shed for me. Oh, enable me to resign myself to thee! At thy altar may I renew my dedication. May I present my body and soul as a living sacrifice. Lord, if thou callest me to remain here, I would serve thee with all humility of mind and all joy of heart, in the gospel of thy Son. But, Lord, if thou choosest me to go, I would here at thy altar, say, ‘Here I am, send me.’ Lord, accept the sacrifice of my will.”

Perhaps there are some who think it strange that God’s people should ever be called upon to go into a position of uncertainty. God is all-wise, why does he not make their way clear before them? as he is all-powerful, why does he not remove their obstacles? as he is all-good, why does he leave them in a state which must naturally be one of more or less discomfort if not distress? The answer to all this is, God will have his people live *on* him and *in* him; and, for his own glory and their instruction, he puts them into such positions as are most suitable for their learning so to do. They must be prepared to say in every position, “Here am I.” Alas! when we look back upon our past life, how very much have we in this particular come short of the glory of God. We have often cut the Gordian knot; we have burst through the labyrinth, when God would have had us thread its mazes with a clew of his providing. And, now, when we review this past; and, perhaps in the quiet

of calm reflective retirement, go through all the circumstances over again ; and judge our own conduct, and contemplate things with a larger knowledge of their varied bearings, — how short do we see ourselves to have come in faith ; how excited and unsteady were we ; how, when God called to us, did he not find us where he would have us be ; and, moreover, how did he find us where he would not have us to be.

May we henceforth be willing to say concerning the condition of *uncertainty*, if God manifestly put us into it, “ Here am I.” If God say, “ It is my will that thou shouldest be uncertain about thy abode ; then, like the apostle who had no certain dwelling-place, may we be able to erect our altar in our lodging ; and may we take up there the position of a wayfaring man, and say, “ *Here* am I.” “ Where is my home to be ? ” is perhaps the question of some one longing for rest, longing to surround himself with the various little comforts and charms of home. Not yet does God show where ; then must I wait in peace. And so with regard to how certain things will turn out. The uncertainty attending them gnaws into our hearts ; we would almost feel a relief in hearing that they were likely to turn out badly ; “ anything,” we say, “ in preference to this uncertainty.” Ah ! let us beware lest we hasten on the worst ; lest we cause the elements of trouble, which God in mercy keeps in solution, to precipitate and form a bitter sediment, — dregs which the Lord will make us drink up. By our haste, or our obstinacy, or our unbelief, we may, so to speak, spoil God’s arrangements for us, and so come to bitter

grief. Is it manifest that the Lord will have us to stand on ground where thick mists surround us, mists, in which, perhaps, we hear all sorts of sounds, some perplexing and some terrifying, or mists in which we hear no sound of life and motion, but all is ominously calm? Then, dear reader, there must we stand beside the altar on which we willingly offer up our own will; and say, Work it out as Thou wilt, O my God, "Here am I."

What solace and what strength would be thus provided for the short and sharp, or the long and wearing uncertainties of the sick room; whether that room be our own, or that of some loved one, far dearer than ourselves! There is something peculiarly wearing in keeping on day after day, with no idea of what or when will be the end of illness. How should we be helped if we realized the altar in this state of uncertainty; if, when from fitful slumber, we opened our eyes in the dull gray of the morning; or when that morning broke and found us watching beside some sick bed, we talked with God, and said, "Here am I;" and if, when the stealthy twilight of the evening came, we from the self-same place could say the self-same words, "Here!" others are abroad in the pleasures, the interests, the business of life, but I am "Here" — "here" — not from human choice, but from divine appointment — in a place which I have not sought out, and which human flesh would never have chosen, but which the Lord hath showed me. The weary days of blindness and deafness would lose much of their trouble, if, with relation to those afflictions, men could realize the

appointing hand of God, and say Abraham's words ; they would thus recognize the place of trial as that of blessing, and there, certainly, a blessing they should find.

Let us learn to take up the patriarch's words *when we are alone*. We may be called to be alone in our undertakings, with none to help us ; alone in our heart's longings, with none to understand us ; alone in our feelings, with none to sympathize with us ; alone in our dwellings, with none to commune with us ; alone in our grief, with none to weep with us ; alone in our responsibility, with none to share our burden with us ; alone in our disappointment, with none to cheer us ; alone with chafed spirits and irritable bodies, and none to soothe us ; alone, because all who would have been with us have died out ; because every leaf has been shaken from the tree, and we are left with almost unnatural vitality to hang on in life, and tremble with every blast, and live on through damp and cold and wind, alone. Where, it matters not, whether on mountain height, or in shadowy vale ; there in our solitude let us feel that we are set by God ; and there let us be prepared to answer, when his voice calls, and say, "*Here am I.*"

It may be that we have to bear for Christ ; to endure something which is secret, as between God and our own selves ; some bitter internal strife ; some mortification which corrodes like rust ; or to endure something which is open in the way of trial, so that for Christ's sake it is evident that we are unloved and to be shunned. Once more erect we our altar here also ; and here let us rehearse Abraham's

words, so that when the voice from heaven calls us by name, we may be quick and ready in our response, "Here am I." And let us bear in mind that we shall be called by name. It will not be a voice saying, "Who art thou?" it will not be one saying, "What doest thou here?" as was that voice which spake to Elijah; but it will be one speaking to thee, as a person about whom everything is known, for the voice shall come from Him that knows all things, — from God.

It is manifest that space would fail were we to try and catalogue the varied places and the varied scenes, in which, after some measure, may be echoed by the believer these grand yet simple words of the Father of the Faithful. All circumstances and places, all seasons and societies, afford standing ground for him that will be found, with a willing heart, in the place where God would have him be. Let no man be deceived; we need not of necessity climb the mountain side, and stand upon the pointed rock, in order to give Abraham's response; the smooth and mossy turf will oftentimes afford as true a standing ground for the man of faith. Yes! let us not be deceived. We need not of necessity hold ourselves in readiness to part with what is dear as an only child, in order to be recognized from heaven by name. Oh, no! God tries his people by little things as well as great; yea, some of his greatest trials come without the binding cord and glittering knife; what we must be solicitous about is not the way of our trial, but that we have that within us which will bear the trial, whenever, wheresoever, and

by whomsoever it comes ; that our lips be but the mouthpiece of our heart when we say, at all times, in all places, and under all dispensations, “ Here am I.”

In Abraham’s case we see what strengthening God can give ; and surely this ought to encourage us. Well indeed may we say a word on this before we conclude, for we shudder as we think of what a believer may be called upon to undergo. But God is all-sufficient, and this consideration, and this only, enables us to contemplate, with any degree of calmness the fearfulness of many trials.*

And we see what a height man *can* attain to, and what glory man *can* gain. It was on Calvary that Jesus won his glory ; it was on Moriah that Abraham won his. Where will God call us, dear reader, that we in his grace and strength may win ours, — the glory that he has linked to obedience, and to honoring him ; for them that honor me I will honor, saith the Lord, — ah, where, indeed ! To him let us leave all ; not seeking trial, yet also not declining it ; not forecasting it ere it come, yet also not astonished when it does. Let us stand by his grace and strength, ready for doing and bearing all, even for binding our sacrifice with cords, and, if need be, for holding the knife ourselves, and so for answering the voice from heaven, and saying, “ *Here am I.*”

* Appendix C.



III.

Yet,

"Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." — THESS. III. 15.

ONE of the most painful effects of the fall was the unbalancing of man's mind. This has brought misery upon man himself, misery upon his friends, and misery upon the world, and has entered, not only into the great matters which are considered worthy of being recorded in history, but into the little ones, which, after all, form the largest part of the sum total of human life. The groans of the battle-field, the chicanery of mercantile life, the secret misery of families, the abiding sorrow of many a solitary, embittered life, could easily be traced to this fountain-head of woe — this confusing element — unceasingly at work.

A little reflection would persuade us of this. What but unbalanced ambition has deluged the earth with blood, — ambition set loose from all controlling power, and not even bounded by its capacity to act? What but unbalanced love of wealth has made men

plunder others, either legitimately or illegitimately, and plunder themselves of peace and rest, and even the ordinary animal enjoyments of exercise and air? What but unbalanced love of enjoyment has made men sacrifice all others to themselves, and live day by day in filling their mouths with what will at last prove gravel-stones to break their teeth? Discounting life's pleasures at a usurious rate, they find themselves beggared with *ennui* when all is gone! It matters not where we turn, we shall find the misery of this want of balance everywhere; and we may just observe, ere we pass to the matter which we are now about more immediately to consider, that the true corrective of the disordered balance, is, and ever must be, the sanctification of the whole man by the Spirit of God. There is, no doubt, a kind of philosophy which can act within a certain limited range, but it cannot enter either into the heights or depths of human life, its chasms and its crevices; the spangled heaven on which it looks, the teeming earth on which it treads; that which alone can penetrate all things, which can control, arrange, balance, and keep in joint, is God's Spirit, — that Spirit ordering, and pervading, and balancing disordered and unbalanced man.

Now all this misery is not produced in the world alone! The Church of God in the world, and subject to the operations of the unruly wills and affections, not only of grossly sinful men, but even of true believers, is a partaker of the miseries which result from this unbalancing of man. Her history, so far as she is outwardly concerned, is full of tempests by

which she has been driven from pole to pole. It tells of tropical heat and polar cold ; of fire and water ; of violent convulsions, which now surged up into mountain heights, and now sank down into almost unfathomable depths ; and whence came it all ? From the unbalanced minds of men, who looked for truth, not in the revelation of God's mind, but in the triumph of their own passions, or in the violent reactions from some state of things which had just gone before. So will the Church of God be torn until its Lord appears, and by his manifested sovereignty reduces all into harmony and peace.

We have now to consider the case of a solitary member of the Church, in connection with one of the little words which meet us so powerfully in Holy Scripture.

St. Paul tells the Thessalonians that if any man obey not his word by that epistle, that man is to be noted ; the Church is to have no company with him, that he may be ashamed ; "yet," says the apostle, "count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*"

Reality was counted as something in the early Church, to be a Christian even in name was then to be a marked man ; and consequently the acts of each individual were reflected upon the whole body, and

*The word "yet" is not to be found in so many letters in the original, it is, however, almost, if not altogether, essential to the spirit of the passage. The idea upon which we are about to dwell, would be thoroughly brought out by the little word 'but' (but admonish him as a brother) ; we must, however, retain the word we find in our translation as giving the best sense of the original. Bengel says, "*Kaì μη*, and yet do not; caution is given us on all sides lest we fall into extremes." Alford, on the other hand, says, *Kaì* is more delicate than *ἀλλὰ* or *ὁ δὲ* would be: q.d. "And I know that it will follow as a consequence of your being Christians, that ye will, etc."

how each of her members acted was of deep moment to the Church of Christ. Discipline is all-important in the face of the enemy, and in those days the Church and her enemies stood unmistakably face to face. Discipline was felt to be essential, and it was carried out with deep reality and power.

And one reason why the Church is now so lax in discipline is because the line which separates her from the world is so indistinct. She has been such good friends with the world that she cannot afford to be too energetic in rebuking it. It would seem hard and treacherous, after having gone a long way with it, to turn round sharply upon it at some unexpected turn in the road, and say, "I see that thou art in the very gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity ; thou must change altogether or thou must perish."

The world does not expect to hear such language as this now-a-days ; and the Church has that backwardness of spirit, which naturally comes upon us when we know that we are not expected to do or say anything, and so it comes to pass that evil goes on unrebuked, and offenders are left unnoticed and consequently unashamed.

The object of these pages, however, is the personal profit of the readers, so let us turn to the teachings which are here afforded for ourselves.

We see here, first of all, THE GREAT READINESS OF EVIL TO INTRODUCE ITSELF. It is a melancholy fact that this is the case, not only here, but everywhere. Evil is lying in wait ready to introduce itself under all circumstances, and all the changes incidental to

those circumstances ; it is ready to operate on all dispositions, and is prepared to act even upon the bare appearances of things, so as to induce us to make false deductions from them, although it has scarce even the shadow of ground on which to stand. Evil is always lying at the door ; the smallest opening suffices to let it in.

This is as true with respect to religious as to worldly matters. Satan is ready to interfere with all the offices of ministry ; with the efforts of societies and individuals in doing good ; with committees, associations, and the like ; and he often meddles with only too much success. What little matters split up religious communities, just as an air-bubble will make worthless the great iron casting, which but for it might have endured in strength for many a year. A word, a look will often do the mischief ; but it is not easy to tell what will repair it, when once it is done.

Now here, in the case before us, we find evil on the watch to introduce itself amongst a Christian community ; and the apostle, foreseeing its likelihood, gives a salutary caution against it. An offender in the Church is to be taken note of ; a difference is to be put between him and others ; he may have to be put into a state of separation from them ; and now, says the apostle, take care, do not allow the mere human element to come in ; you must not allow your flesh to act, in making this chastisement a matter of bitter personality, " Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

There is a natural hidden malevolence in the nature of man ; and this is carefully to be kept under,

and not allowed to come into action. One would think that no emotion but that of the tenderest pity would fill the heart at being obliged to inflict pain and punishment upon one with whom we had walked until recently in fellowship and privilege and love ; that we should say, " Oh, how heavily *must* I strike ? " not " How heavily may I strike ? " but no ! the evil of the poor human heart is ready to crop up in a moment ; it is ready to change a brother into an enemy at once.

And with sorrow and shame, it must be remarked, that nowhere does this deceitfulness of the poor heart show itself so strongly as amongst religious communities. Often under the specious pretext of religious zeal, men allow personal hatred or enmity to spring up ; and when the time for the reconciliation of a penitent offender comes, the difficulty is not to reconcile him to the body of God's Church, but to those who have allowed human feelings to come in, and who have thus allowed personal enmities to grow up.

No evils are so hard to eradicate as those which intertwine themselves with religious principles, and that, at times, so intimately that it seems almost impossible to separate them ; the tares and the wheat root so closely together, that one would almost think that to pull up the one would be to pull up the other also.

That holy man of God, Henry Martyn, felt this, when he allowed himself to speak sharply on one occasion against the Government. It was with the sincerest grief that he heard, during his abode at

Aldeen, of an order issued by the Government (though it afterwards proved that he was misinformed) to prevent their preaching and distributing tracts. So perplexed and excited was he by the intelligence that it even deprived him of sleep; and he spoke with so much vehemence against the measures of Government, as, upon reflection, to afford him matter of self-condemnation. "I know not," said he, "what manner of spirit I am of; I fancy it is all zeal for God, but what falsehood is this! I am severe against a governor, not making allowances for what he knows. Oh! does it become me to be judging others? Did Jesus canvass the proceedings of Government in the spirit of one of this world? I pray to be preserved from ever falling into this snare again. May I with poverty of spirit go my way, and never again trouble myself with what does not belong to me! I trust I shall be able to distinguish between zeal and self-will. Let me never fancy I have zeal 'till my heart overflows with love to every human being.'" "Zeal and self-will!" the heavenly virtue and the fleshly imitation of it; the sterling coin and the worthless counterfeit.

Another branch of the evil against which the apostle would here guard is *an entire mistake of the end of discipline and dealing with a soul*. What had the Thessalonians, what has the Church, to do with personal enmities and personal feelings? The offender had sinned against God, but he was to be dealt with in order that he might be restored to God; he had feelings to be wrought upon; yes, as a member of the Church, though an erring one, he had claims

upon their sympathies which must be met ; he was a brother, and as a brother he was to be dealt with ; it may be plainly and sharply, but still in love. We shall, however, have to speak of this more at large a little further on.

Now whence, it will be worth our while to inquire, does this evil come ? In a no small degree from this tendency to extremes of which we have already spoken. Man seldom acts judicially ; his impulse is at once to jump to conclusions, and those extreme ones. He does not limit himself to the matter in hand, but allows all sorts of collateral questions to mix with it ; and too often he helps to mystify himself by taking into the account circumstances which have nothing to do with the point in hand at all.

Then there is this lurking malevolence of poor human nature. The moment it discovers a pin hole, it desires to work it into a great hole ; yes, if it can only get its fingers in, it longs to rend the piece asunder. We may contend with this malevolence ; we may be on the watch against it ; we may hold it in check by the exercise of that charity which hopeth, beareth, and believeth all things ; but the very activity required from that charity, and the efforts it has to make, show how deeply rooted is there something else within.

Is not something also to be attributed to a want of depth in our perception of Christian brotherhood, both of itself and of its claims ? The Christian family should be like pure water contained in a precious vessel, capable, no doubt, of being detailed into a number of isolated drops, but still one great whole ;

it is too often like sand grains, each complete in itself, hard and unconnected and dry. We look at our brethren as shut up in the same vessel with us, but not as part of us. And hence, it comes to pass that we deal with offending brethren, not as part of ourselves, of our own family, but rather as persons with whom we have no personal concern ; whose only connection with us is not a tie of nature but of accidental circumstances ; they happen, some how, to be in the same boat with us, and that is pretty nearly all.

Now let us look at the development of this evil, — this tendency to forget brotherly kindness, and to allow enmity to take its place. We shall not confine ourselves to the case of offenders in spiritual things, but look also at those in ordinary life. See how this evil develops itself.

It is ready, in the first place, *to treat a person as irrevocably bad*. We allow ourselves to think that “such and such an one cannot be brought to a sense of his position ; he is incorrigible ; he cannot be made anything of ; he will never change.” And then as a natural consequence, we say, “Where is the use in trying ?” and then, never having tried, or having tried in a very despairing, cursory kind of way, we determine to have no more to do with them ; that is, in point of fact, to cast him out, to count him as an enemy, and certainly by no means to admonish him as a brother. To believe a person irrevocably bad is the best way to make him so ; it is, as far as we can, to break the strings of his moral being, upon which the spirit is able to act, and by which, in the ordinary process of God’s dealings, he might be restored.

In daily life, in our dealings with servants, children, dependents, in fact, with any one, let us be very slow in treating them as irreclaimable. This will make them say, "Well, if I am so bad, I will be bad!" it will stir up the devil within them, and thrust them into depths from which they never may escape. We do not say that offenders are not to be rebuked, that we may not have even to rebuke sharply and pungently; but let us not smash into pieces that which might, after all, be restored at some future day.

Further, this evil manifests itself in so operating on our minds as to *make us forget former good points in the offender*. How often when we have been offended, has our anger risen, and we were ready to forget many a former good trait in the character of the offender, perhaps, even many a kindness he had done ourselves; and we have allowed our attention to fix itself exclusively upon the recent offence or wrong.

Such and such a person has done so and so; he has had a great fall; he has, perhaps, been guilty of a great scandal in the Church. At once the impulse of the natural mind is to say, "He is no Christian at all;" to cast him out, as a decided enemy, never to trust him, never to receive him again. There may have been many previous evidences in his favor, much might be said on his behalf to encourage his censors to have, at least, some hope of him; but no, all that is forgotten, and so he is counted as an enemy, and not admonished as a brother. A little pity, a little brotherly love, a little expostulation might have done much with him, even sharp broth-

erly admonition might have awakened him ; but hate begets hate, and not only do we recede from the offender, but the offender recedes from us. The distance is being increased at a fearful speed, for there are two engaged in making it as wide as they can ; they are lending a Satanic energy to each other ; repulsion and not restoration becomes the leading idea of their mind.

In daily life, let us take care how we allow a present offence to warp our judgments about individuals, and to blot out the remembrance of the position they occupied in the past. Very often, when a person has offended, nothing is considered as too bad to be said about him. A little thought might have shown us how many good points he had ; perhaps it might have revealed those good points as brought out to ourselves ; perhaps it would have suggested to us the idea of remonstrance instead of rejection. But no ; off goes the poor mind into the very opposite direction ; and in perhaps a moment, our brother becomes our enemy. Justice, generosity, charity all exclaim against this ; but how often are they powerless against the tide of human passion.

Then there is another way in which this evil develops itself. It makes us put a false interpretation on things. *It makes us look at things in a bad light that are not bad in themselves.* The poor understanding and judgment have become warped, their eye has become jaundiced ; and the consequence is, they see everything warped and yellow. Where it is possible to put two opposite interpretations on the offended one's course of action, they are sure to choose the bad

interpretation, and not the good. Have we not often found ourselves magnifying little molehills into mountains? Taking notice of little things that really were of no consequence, and that we had passed by thousands of times without noticing at all, until the persons by whom they were done had become offenders in our eyes? And these sad experiences are just developments of enmity. We have imbibed a personal dislike, and our perverse minds second the feeling, and confirm it. It is astonishing how this grows upon us, unless it be constantly watched and put down. Under its influence, freckles become warts, and warts become wens, until the object of our enmity becomes so loathsome, or, at least, so distasteful to us, that there is no human probability of our being reconciled to him again.

Mark one further development. This evil *makes us believe certain persons to be enemies to us, because we behave as enemies to them.* Now we may have no reason for believing this. It is quite true that, as a general rule, love begets love and hate begets hate, and the natural tendency of poor fallen nature is to make a man dislike whoever he knows dislikes him; but apart from this, without any reason whatever, we jump at the conclusion that so-and-so must dislike us, whereas all we really know is that we dislike him. Surely it is time enough to believe that a man is our enemy when we have some grounds to go upon for the unbelief. If we waited for these, a man might at least be on speaking terms with some persons from whom he now turns away. The truth is, there is lurking here a deep self-deceit; we want to rid our

selves of the name of ill-feeling, and consequently we gradually shift it from our own shoulders to that of the one we esteem an enemy. The prominent idea in our mind then becomes this: not, "we hate him," but, "he hates us; "and so having, as we think, got rid of the guilt, we continue to live comfortably in sin. The whole of this evil would have been averted if we had not counted the offender as an enemy, but had admonished him as a brother.

And now, what but bad effects can we expect to flow from the evil against which the apostle would guard us here? Warped judgment, bitterness of feeling, permanent estrangement, hurt to the sensibilities of our Christian system, all testify to the evil of our mistake. We are personal sufferers, as men always are when they make moral as well as physical mistakes. And the bad effects do not terminate with ourselves; they affect others also. Those who are treated as enemies become *hardened*; they say, "If I am bad, I will be bad;" they will very possibly take a kind of satanic delight in being worse. The absence of softening influences soon make themselves felt. Moreover, if we treat offenders as enemies, we shall perhaps make them judge of the system by us the professors of it; and so make them turn from religion altogether. They will be in all probability under the influence of strong feelings, — feelings which will not stop to reason, — which will not, and indeed cannot, dissociate the professors of a creed and that creed itself, and they will say, "Well, if that's your religion, I don't want to have anything to say to it." No doubt, many a man has been turned from religion

by the professors of it; and many an one has become altogether desperate because he has been treated injudiciously. He has been dealt with vindictively and not restoratively, and Satan rousing his natural passions, he has made his dwelling-place among the tombs, a curse to himself, and to every one that came within his reach.

We should never forget the case of the Corinthian upon whom, no doubt, as a great offender, a heavy hand of discipline was laid. The discipline was effective; the offender was convinced, and now, says St. Paul, in 2 Corinthians ii. 6, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted on many. that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, *and* comfort him; lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." These little words "*and*" and "*lest*" are very full of meaning. Bare cold forgiveness, a formal restoration to church membership and church privilege, is all that the Corinthians would most likely have accorded to this great offender; but the apostle tells them to go farther than this. They are not to allow him to get comfort as best he can from the common ordinances, they are to come into personal contact with him, they are to "*comfort*" him, to meet him in all his heart-sinkings, to encourage him in his shyness, to let him know by their manner that he is indeed in full membership again, — not only the membership of communion, but that of affection. They were to act towards him, not grudgingly, and of necessity, but with that freeness of love, wherewith their Lord acted towards them.

Nor let us forget that little "lest." "Lest, perhaps such an one should be swallowed up in overmuch sorrow." The apostle foresaw what despair might drive a man to. He knew that the Devil was lying in wait to catch this poor soul at the proper moment of depression. Now the restoration must be thorough; the feelings of the repentant one would be naturally sensitive and suspicious too; do it, says the apostle, thoroughly: "Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love towards him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also; for if I forgive anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ, lest Satan should get an advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices." In a case like this we have an excellent instance of the reproductive power of evil; how it acts and reacts in an ever-increasing ratio. Our evil feeling creating evil feeling in another, then our consciousness of that evil feeling towards us making us more bitter still; and thus it goes on, and where the limit will be who can tell?

Now let us turn to a consideration of, —

HOW THIS EVIL IS TO BE MET.

First of all: *By a remembrance of the existence of relationship.* The apostle says, "Admonish him as a brother." Let us enter upon this business, admitting our relationship to the one with whom we have to do. The apostle does not say, "Let him off because he is a brother," but, "admonish him as a brother." Certainly he must be admonished. Per-

haps common justice requires it, perhaps the interests of the Church call for it, his own welfare is concerned in not being allowed to go on unrebuked. It may be that right cannot be done to others, or to ourselves, unless we bring before the people the evil they have done; loving, faithful admonition is not only warranted, but called for in many instances, by the word of God.

We have need to remember this injunction to brotherly love in the performance of this duty, for beyond all doubt the natural tendency of the administration of a rebuke is to make an enemy. In many and many an instance a friend, even a believer, will never be the same to you again.* As long as you go on with some Christians as though they were perfect, you are their friend; as soon as ever you remonstrate with them, or admonish them, you are their enemy. Ministers of the gospel, especially, know this by sad experience; how often have they wrapped up their admonitions in the kindest language, and spoken them with the kindest accents; and yet, never afterwards were they on the same footing with the admonished one as before. The cause of this is the

* How sadly Baxter in his "Dying Thoughts" bemoans the shortcomings in this respect of "relations" and "wise, religious, faithful friends;" "their error, selfishness, pride, passion, and division." "Our friends here are wise, but they are unwise also; they are faithful, but partly unfaithful; they are holy, but also, alas! too sinful; they have the image of God, but blotted and dishonored by their faults; they do God and his Church much service, but they also do much against him, and too much for Satan, even when they intend the honor of God. They promote the gospel, but they also hinder it, their weakness, selfishness, error, pride, passion, division, contention, scandals and remissness, do oft so much hurt, that it is hard to discern whether it be not greater than their good to the Church or their neighbors. Our friends are our helpers and comforters, but how often also are they our hinderers, troubles, and grief?"

personality of the admonition. The minister might have said as much as he liked in general terms from the pulpit; but when the individual could not escape in the crowd, or was personally addressed, even though in private, then came the offence. We would only say on this point, You who have to admonish, remember what the *natural* tendency of admonition is, and let it make you all the more careful in your method of remonstrating or rebuking; and you who are admonished, just think how unreasonable it is to suppose that a person must hate, or even dislike, you, because he points out a fault in you. Surely you do not mean to put up for being perfect; and if you do not, is it not just possible that you are in the wrong, and deserve the admonition which a Christian friend has given. The truth is, offended pride lies at the bottom of an unwillingness to receive rebuke; and from it flows hatred and enmity towards the one on whom the administration of such rebuke has fallen. A man should reason with himself, and say, when he feels this enmity rising in his heart, "Why should I esteem so-and-so as an enemy; what sign has he ever shown of being such? Is there not justice in what he has said? If admonition were given and received in a Christian spirit, how many alienations and heart-burnings would be avoided in the Church of God!

Let us return, however, to the point immediately in hand, viz., the way in which the evil of our own natures is to be met in our dealings with others. We have pointed out that, first of all, we should remember the existence of relationship as existing between

ourselves and the person to be rebuked ; let us further remember *the nearness of that relationship*, — we are to admonish him “as a brother.” Ah ! we sometimes act as though the offending one were a far more distant relation than that, — as though he were no relation at all. We must set about this work in the consciousness of brotherhood ; in the remembrance that the one with whom we have to deal has a common Father with ourselves ; that we are redeemed with the same blood, and are members of the same family. We must take friendly and loving feelings with us, and not wait to have them created by the conduct of the offender. Perhaps at the outset he will receive the admonition so badly, that our natural feeling would be repulsion from him, rather than attraction to him ; and nothing but the loving feeling that we take with us will counteract that.

Simeon says, “The medical attendant of my brother has just been expressing his surprise to see how much I am worn within this half-year. I am very sensible of it myself ; and expect that I shall be much more worn, if my people continue in such a grievous state. I would that my eyes ‘were a fountain of tears, to run down day and night.’ Would you believe it ? I have been used to read the Scriptures, to get from them rich discoveries of the power and grace of Christ ; to learn how to minister to a loving and obedient people : I am now reading them really and literally to know how to minister to a conceited, contentious, and rebellious people. Two qualities, I am sure, are requisite : meekness and patience ; yet, in some cases, I shall be constrained to ‘rebuke with

authority.' I have been used to sail in the Pacific ; I am now learning to navigate the Red Sea, that is full of shoals and rocks, with a very intricate passage. I trust the lord will carry me safely through ; but my former trials have been nothing to this."

Further, we would remark, that there must be a subjugation in self, of all those feelings which create *enemies* and *enmities*. "If," says Simeon, "in acting I should have my own spirit unduly exercised, I must of necessity be injured in my own soul, however righteous my cause might be." Self is sure to try and manifest when we have just occasion to find fault with others ; and its tendency is to make us lose sight of the evil immediately before us, and substitute for it our own personal grievances with the offender.

We must beware of pride, not because of the offender's obstinacy in the abstract, but because *our* opinion, or *our* advice, has not been taken. We are often more concerned with ourselves as the expounders of certain principles, than with the principles themselves ; and often triumph more in the fact that *we have been the means* of such and such an one's change, than in the fact that *he has been* changed. The moment a man sees that self has mingled itself with the reproof that is being administered, or the truth that is being declared to him, that moment he feels he has a personal antagonist to enter into conflict with, and he will contend with us, and not with the matter immediately in hand. We must entirely sink self. We naturally feel that we are despised when our opinion or reproof are set at naught ;

and the natural result of that feeling is not sorrow, but indignation ; the passion put into motion is not that of pity, but of pride.

“ My spirit,” says Henry Martyn, “ felt composed after the dispute (with his mocking Moonshee), by simply looking to God, as one who had engaged to support his own cause ; and I saw it to be my part to pursue my way through the wilderness of this world, looking only to that redemption which daily draweth nigh. The same thoughts continued through the evening. I reflected, while looking at the stream gliding by, the smooth current of which showed its motion only by the moon shining upon it, that all are alike carried down the stream of time, — that in a few years there will be another generation of Hindoos, Mussulmen, and English in this country, and we are now but just speaking to each other as we are passing along. How should this consideration quell the tumult of anger and impatience when I cannot convince men ? Oh how feeble an instrument must a creature so short-sighted be ! How necessary is it that God should be continually raising up new instruments ; and how easily can he do it ; ‘ the government is on his shoulders,’ Jesus is able to bear the weight of it ; we need not be oppressed with care and fear, etc.”

And again he writes in his journal, not long before his death : —

“ *Sept. 5th.* — This long march was far from being a fatiguing one. The air, the road, and my spirits were good. Here I was well accommodated, but had to mourn over my impatient temper towards my

servants : there is nothing that disturbs my peace so much. How much more noble and god-like to bear with calmness, and observe with pity rather than with anger, the failings and offences of others ! Oh, that through grace I may be enabled to recollect myself in the time of temptation ! Oh, that the Spirit of God may check my folly, and at such times bring the lowly Saviour to my view ! ”

In proportion as we can get out of “self” we get into God, and can leave matters with calmness and peace to him. In proportion as we have the lowly Saviour before us will our action towards offenders be like his.

We must beware, especially in religious admonition, of allowing the feeling of vexation at the offending person’s being separated from our party, or sect, or clique, to act upon us and make us rebuke, or blame, or remonstrate with the bitterness of a partisan.

We must not forget that we are liable to make mistakes.

August 18th. — “ I have found it important to my work of the ministry, says Rauschenbusch, to notice that hitherto I have not boldly enough warned those persons, concerning the state of whose souls I could not but inwardly feel some serious question, and especially when the case is that of elder Christians ; that I have had too free and familiar intercourse with others, and have not considered that you might easily turn this to hypocrisy and spiritual pride ; I ought better to adjust myself to the weakness and frailty of others. Further, in

that I am apt to form my opinion of others too quickly and severely, especially of those who did not at the moment appear to me to be spiritually awake, or whom I no longer see connected with other Christians. I felt ashamed of this to-day, by meeting with a man whom I had not seen for two years among the people of Zion, and yet who seems to have advanced in faith and piety. Oh how admirably great appeared to me the faithfulness of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, with respect to him! Really the consideration of this person's case proved instructive to me. And, thirdly, that my constitutional temperament so easily overheats my zeal for the cause of God; and that a Christian minister is more in his place by alluring and beseeching than by heated zeal. Lord Jesus, make us poor shepherds right humble, pure, quite full of thy spirit, quite affectionate to the flock, and unwearied in the pasture of thy word."

How often we find a man become the object of abuse from former friends, simply because he has gone from one church to another, or consorted with one circle of the same body of Christians more than with another. There is no more blinding influence than that of partisanship; none into which the feeling of personal bitterness more keenly enters. Let us not forget "the brotherhood" of which the apostle speaks, and that the end of admonition ever must be restoration and not destruction; it is, properly speaking, an act of mercy, and ceases to be "admonition" when it becomes mingled with hate. Let us always remember that the end of admonition is not repulsion but attraction, and then we shall be careful so to administer it as to persuade and win.

Let us remember, further, that *we must think more of violated principle than of offended personality*. In rebuking, we must deal much more with facts and principles than with our opinion of them. The facts and principles, if they are evident, the offender cannot deny ; but he will, in all probability attempt to deny our reasoning upon them. He will do that, just because it is what *we* say. Let us keep as much as the nature of the case will admit from the "I," from "our" opinion, and always keep edging the fact or principle into the foreground. Individuals and individual opinions afford something palpable to quarrel with ; but it is very hard to pummel a fact or principle, therefore keep as much as possible to them.

And in remonstrating and admonishing it is very helpful to use the formula, "Don't you think?" instead of "I think." It is astonishing how this, as the common saying says, "takes the wind out of a man's sails." He finds himself agreeing with you before he knows it. He feels that you are treating him with respect and kindness. He feels bound to give an opinion himself, and not merely to reject an opinion given by you. And when the onus of giving an opinion is on him, he will probably pause a moment before he stultifies himself, and commits himself to anything rash.

It sometimes happens that, when we have occasion to remonstrate, or admonish, we are met at once by violence on the part of the person with whom we have to deal, — violence in language both as to the quantity and quality of what is said. Now there is

as little use in reasoning with an angry as with a drunken man. For a time, the person under the influence of excitement is quite incapable of listening to reason, and, therefore, it is of no use to attempt anything of the kind with him. The best way to act under these circumstances is to let the excited man run on as long as he likes, without interposing a check of any kind. The least check, the least remark, only serves to add fuel to the flame. Listen to him in solemn silence, until he pulls up, which he probably will do quite suddenly at the last, from fair exhaustion either of strength or words.

There is a passage in Henry Martyn's diary which shows us what good effects may follow from this course of treatment. He says, —

Oct. 20th. — I walked into the village, where the boat stopped for the night, and found the worshippers of Cali by the sound of their drums and cymbals. I did not think of speaking to them, on account of their being Bengalees. But being invited by the Brahmins to walk in, I entered within the railing, and asked a few questions about the idol. The Brahmin, who spoke bad Hindoostanee, disputed with great heat, and his tongue ran faster than I could follow; and the people, who were about one hundred, shouted applause. But I continued to ask my questions without making any remarks upon the answers. I asked, among other things, whether what I had heard of Vishnu and Brahma were true, which he confessed. I forbore to press him with the consequences, which he seemed to feel, and then I told him what was my belief. The man grew quite mild,

and said it was *chula bat* (good), and asked me seriously, at last, what I thought, — “ Was idol worship true or false ? ” I felt it a matter of thankfulness that I could make known the truth of God, though but a stammerer, and that I had declared it in the presence of the Devil. And this also I learned, that the power of gentleness is irresistible. I never was more astonished than at the change in the deportment of this hot-headed Brahmin.”

There are many advantages derivable from dealing thus patiently.

In the first place, the offender must feel that you have acted fairly by him. You have allowed him to say everything he can for himself, or on the subject in hand. In the next place, he must feel, when it becomes your turn to speak, that he is bound in fairness to hear you without interruption ; and it will be well to remind him of this. Then he is not buoyed up by the thought that he, too, has something to say on the matter, for he has already run himself out in saying everything he could think of. Moreover, he has a certain uncomfortable feeling that he has lost command of himself, and has to deal with a man who is calm and collected, especially if you never raise your voice unduly, or exhibit any traces of personal irritation. Moreover, you will probably have to deal with a man suffering under a reaction. A reaction generally sets in very soon after excitement ; and after being allowed full play, you will generally find that the offender’s effervescence is utterly gone, and cannot be stirred up to the original boiling-point again. A man generally knows that he has been in a pas-

sion when that passion has subsided; and he feels foolish at his display of temper, and will probably, under the influence of collapse offer a very feeble opposition, if, indeed, he offers any, to what you have to say.

Of course, it would be subversive of all discipline to permit a servant or a child, whose duty it is at once to obey to enter upon such an amount of argument or self-vindication as would involve treatment of this kind. What we have been saying refers to those not placed in these relationships; and it will be worth the reader's while to try this course of action, should he meet with the violence of which we have been speaking. Remember that if you let a man *run on*, he will soon *run out*.

And now let us add in conclusion a few words upon the beneficial effects of treating an offender, not as an enemy, but as a brother.

When a man sees that we have these friendly feelings towards him, the power of love begins to work upon him, and the offender becomes softened. Love has a softening influence, which will make the heart become impressible in many a case where all argument and all authority would fail. If a man see that you have good will toward him, he will at least listen, and take in good part what you have to say. If you come to him as an enemy, his first impulse will be to fight you; if as a friend, to receive you.

There need be, there must be, no compromise of the truth. The work in hand is one of admonishing, — one requiring faithfulness in its execution; and

if it be so performed as to leave no impression of the seriousness of the person performing it, it may as well be left entirely undone. If the work we have in hand be the Lord's, we need not fear, even though the offenders be very daring, and far gone in sin. In Rauschenbusch's life, we have a remarkable instance of boldness and love. There was the bold hand necessary to grasp so desperate an offender, and when he was secured, "the importunity of the honest heart interested in him."

A very bad man had been vexatious to the parish of Bünde, and no one could restrain him. Whenever he pleased, he turned his horse into his neighbors' fields of sown or standing corn; and used to brawl and bluster as he passed along, so that no one dared to approach him. Rauschenbusch determined at length seriously to take him in hand. The small stream that ran through the place, separated Rauschenbusch's glebe farm from the public road, along which this fellow came blustering along his way into the town. Rauschenbusch happened just then to hear him, but being on the other side of the stream, he came to the water's edge within sight of him, and called out, "Muth" (that was his name), "I am coming," and the man was immediately quiet. Rauschenbusch met him directly in the wood just by; and though no one was secure of his life in meeting him there, Rauschenbusch went resolutely up to him, took hold of him with a firm hand, and said, "All Bünde is afraid of you, but I am not afraid of the Devil; and I command you to come to me to-morrow, and to let me know whether you

mean to be a different man. The fellow actually came the next morning, and Rauschenbusch set before him the authority and sacredness of the law of God and the judgment to come; and this he did with all the seriousness of his official character, and with all the importunity of an honest heart interested in him. And though he never could regard him as a converted man, yet he succeeded so far as to bind Satan within him, so that this person was constrained to cease from annoying his fellowmen." *

With happier results did Simeon admonish two great offenders.

"There was one particular instance in which a degree of severity on my part was attended with the happiest effects. Two young men — now blessed servants of the Most High God — came into my church in a most disorderly way; and, as usual, I fixed my eyes upon them with sternness, indicative of my displeasure. One of them was abashed; but the

* We insert the following as an instance of how effectually an admonition may sometimes be administered by silence. Rauschenbusch was the first moral authority in his parish. Under the divine blessing he had quite transformed it. Whereas it had once been the most quarrelsome in the whole country, it had now become the most peaceful. He had urged the necessity of a thorough renovation of the heart; had required love to one's neighbor as the prime fruit of it; had in all their contentions ever smoothed the way to adjustment, and urged the laying aside of differences; and thus had effectually got rid of their contentious disposition. Moreover, he still ceased not to guide by his information and advice; to exhort, to admonish, and even, when necessary, to speak severely. Thus he had once pacifically exhorted a set of hamlet peasants of his parish, who were disposed to go to law with one another. He had taken all possible pains, and had frequently sacrificed considerable time for the purpose of persuading them to an equitable agreement, and had at length succeeded in convincing them that it was best; so they had agreed so to do. Nevertheless he was waited upon one evening by a fresh deputation from them. He bade them come up to him into his room, and then asked "What do you wish further to say to me?" "Mr. Pastor, that we are determined to go to law!" He made them no reply, but opened the door, and showed them the way out. This succeeded, and the lawsuit was dropped.

other — the only one that ever was daring enough to withstand my eye — looked at me again with undaunted, not to say with impious, confidence, refusing to be ashamed. I sent for him the next morning, and represented to him the extreme impiety of his conduct, contrasting it with that of those less hardened, and warning him who it was that he thus daringly defied (“he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth Him that sent me”); and I enjoined him never to come into that church again, unless he came in a very different spirit. To my surprise, I saw him there again the following Sunday, but with a more modest countenance; and from that time he continued to come, till it pleased God to open his eyes, and to lead him into the full knowledge of the gospel of Christ; and in a year or two afterwards he became a preacher of that faith which he once had despised.

“ [As this narrative agrees precisely with the account Mr. Simeon would often give of the remarkable change effected under similar circumstances in two members of his own college, there can be no doubt that the persons here referred to were those two eminently devout men and his attached friends, Richard Godly and the honored biographer of Henry Martyn, John Sargent.] ”

Feebleness in admonishing, protesting, or blaming is no proof of brotherly feeling; the proof is in the way in which this duty is discharged. Love requires faithfulness, but it requires tenderness too. When love must perform an operation, it makes a clean cut, and does not hack and hew and mangle, and leave a jagged edge.

Yes, "admonish him as a brother." Show that you have an interest in him ; and, moreover, that he has an interest in doing right. Let him see that you have his interest in view ; that you are anxious for *his* sake that he should know the error he is in, and so change his erring, it may be his fatal, course. Self-interest is one of the most powerful levers that moves the human heart, and sets in motion human thought and human action ; now show him that the remonstrance is made for his own good, and you may reasonably expect that this will produce its result. But observe that we have said *show*, and not *tell*. To *show* means to point out how it is for his good ; to *tell* is to assume on your part the position of a superior, and at once to arouse bad feeling, and sadly diminish your chance of success. " I tell it to you for your good " is a formula highly calculated to irritate. It is a dictatorial way of dealing with a man, which is calculated to shut him up at once, and which he will in all probability resent.

Another beneficial result of performing this disagreeable duty with brotherly feelings, and in a brotherly way, is that, even if the offender do not see his fault, and return now, standing ground is left for him to return at some future time. Natural feelings of pride and, perhaps, passion may make him apparently heedless of your admonition and arguments ; but the pride will, perhaps, gradually melt, and the passion cool, and all that you have said will be thought over, and it will be remembered that you said it in a friendly and brotherly way. The offender feels that the door is open for him to return, and that

he is sure to receive a good reception from you ; that he has no personal antipathy to remove, no enmity to conciliate ; and all this will, perhaps, facilitate his yielding to your admonition when you are least expecting it.

And how sweet will it be to find ourselves the instruments of restoring an erring one — restoring him to the communion of God's people — to the path of peace and duty — to his better self. Restoration was God's own great work — the work for the accomplishment of which he spared not his own most precious Son, our most precious Lord ; and that which he was so gloriously engaged in, he will delight to see us engaged in also, according to our capacity. All that is needful for our work the Spirit will supply. Yes, he will help us also.

“*Dec. 15th, Evening.* — The Lord (says Rauschenbusch) has this day shamed my unbelief, and answered my weak and oft-repeated prayer. I have been enabled to speak with courage and earnestness to a bitter enemy of the truth about bodily matters, and also about the state of his soul, and, with respect to the latter, with entreaty and meekness. God restrained him so that he could not withstand me. Let every one bring his concerns to the Lord, who most certainly hears and answers prayer and supplication. The children of God have often to blame themselves for being so unsuccessful with the people of the world. They do not pray and wait for his help.”

If we enter upon the work of admonition when it is needful, not in the power of the flesh or the feel-

ings of the flesh, but in the power of the Spirit, and in communion with the Spirit, the influences of that Spirit will not be wanting to us; we shall be privileged to be the restorers of souls. Like the lancet of the wise physician, we shall have wounded only to heal; the poor erring one will thank God who made us like-minded with himself, and say, "He counted me not as an enemy, but admonished me as a brother."





IV.

Yet.

“ Though ye have lain amongst the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” — PSALM lxxviii. 13.

GOD delights in showing the fulness of his character. All in that character is light, and, therefore, all emanations from it must be light also ; and thus must bring glory and honor to his name.

All through Holy Scripture we find this fulness, — full mercy for the penitent ; full judgment for the impenitent ; the sins of the one, though they were like scarlet, being made white as snow ; the sins of the other, bringing down upon their devoted heads “ tribulation and anguish,” — the deep manifestations of indignation and wrath.

If this fulness of God were rightly remembered, it would act with much more power than it does at present upon both these parties. The people of God would enter more deeply into his love, and be more at peace in it ; they would enter into his goodness, and would repose more upon it ; into his power,

and expect more from it; they would look for great things from a great God. And the ungodly, — they also would, perhaps, fear to sin, if they saw how mighty he is to avenge; they would be convicted of their sinfulness, if they saw how pure he is in holiness. Eternity will be ever unfolding the vastness of God, both as regards the saved and the lost, heaven and hell, — the unfathomable depths of darkness, the dazzling effulgence of light.

This fulness is brought before us in two little words in this verse. One of these might be said to be brought up from the depths; and the other to drop down from the heights; yet do they meet together to manifest the fulness of God's beneficence to poor, fallen man. What can be more degrading than the lying amongst the pots? What more exalting than soaring on wings resplendant with silver and gold? The fulness of the degradation and the fulness of the exaltation are linked together by these two little words; and the coupling is of grace, that we, the fallen ones, may arise; that we, the down-hearted ones, may rejoice; that we, the polluted ones, may take to ourselves the grace-provided garments of beauty and glory; and soar heavenward in the enjoyment of heaven-given strength, and in the fulness of heavenly freedom and light.

This is the subject which comes before us here and before entering upon its application to ourselves, let us glance for a moment at its truth as regards the temporal Israel.

Their position had been one of degradation the most complete. "The Egyptians made the children

of Israel to serve with rigor ; and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field : all their service wherein they made them serve was with rigor." [Exodus i. 14.] If ever there was a nation which might have been justly described under the similitude of "lying amongst the pots," that nation was Israel. But if ever there was a nation which might have justly been described under the similitude of the dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold, that nation also was Israel. When the time of their captivity to Egypt had ended, they went forth laden with jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment ; they entered into possession of the fairest heritage on earth ; their temple was the most magnificent object on which the sun could shine ; their shoulder was removed from the burden, and their hands were delivered from the pots (Psalm lxxxi. 6) ; they were fed with the finest of the wheat, and with abundance of honey out of the rock.

True, Israel's beauty and Israel's wealth lasted but a little while ; and given up by God unto their own hearts' lusts, and to walking in their own counsels, they sank down amid the pots again ; they found the level to which the baseness of the human heart will ever lead. And there they are now. As a nation they are amid the pots ; as a community they are, in most places, in no better plight ; even as individuals, they bear upon them the mark of their bitter fall. But Israel is not cut off, though it is cut down ; there is life in the stump and hidden roots of

that wondrous tree. True, it has been blasted by the lightning flashes of heaven ; it has been hacked and hewn by the axes of earth ; its bark has been seamed with the names of its conquerors cut down deep into it with the sword, and branded on it with irons heated seven-fold more than is their wont ; the rains from above have been withheld from it, the juices from beneath have refused to succor it ; the heavens have been to it like brass, the earth like iron ; every influence of good has conspired to stand aloof from it ; every influence of evil to come upon it ; yet Israel "is not dead, but sleepeth ;" living branches shall spring from her seared and worn stump ; branches which shall blossom and fruit, and make melody with every breeze that blows ; the heavens shall refresh her from above, the earth shall feed her from beneath ; for what shall there not be done to one whom the king delighteth to honor, when that king is "King of kings," and the lordship that he exercises that of "Lord of lords."

And when this time of Israel's glory has arrived, and she has shaken off her garments of heaviness, and been robed in her vesture of praise ; when she arises and shines for her light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon her, what similitude, what prophecy, will be better understood than this of the rescued dove ? Israel shall read the depth of her now bygone misery in the light of her new glory ; she shall know what her degradation was when she looks back upon it ; the wings covered with silver, and the feathers with yellow gold, will teach by their wondrous glory, and by the power of contrast, how deep was the defilement of the pots.

But now let us turn to ourselves. There is brought out here a glorious truth upon which we may profitably dwell for a little time. We are taught how God deals with man ; how largely, how fully, how freely ; how, in spite of all obstacle, apparent and real, he can rescue and exalt him. We are taught that a dark past does not insuperably hinder a bright future ; for the God who had a “ Though ” and “ Yet ” for such a nation as the Jews, has one for every sinner of the Gentiles also ; he manifests himself here in his fulness — the fulness of restoring power — power, which can lift from the degradation of the pots, and adorn with a combination of beauty and wealth, with silver and with gold.

We see here first of all, THE MISERABLE CONDITION OF THE POOR SINNER. He is represented as “ lying amongst the pots.” His position is one of *degradation and helplessness* ; he has forgotten the high nobility for which he was originally designed, and has taken his place, like the prodigal, amongst the swine, far away from his father.

This idea of degradation is one which man has always been very loth to entertain ; his fallen nature rebels against a true estimate of itself ; Satan fears lest man should be startled at the hideousness of the sight, and the legitimate results to be drawn from it. This idea of degradation must always be forced upon us, and never establishes itself except after a hard strife. Though man is not too proud to sin, he is too proud to acknowledge himself a bad sinner ; the last place which he will assign to himself is being amongst “ the pots.” But God will always bring

him down to see what he is. He will teach him something about the pots while he is among them, and a great deal more about them after he has left them. The soaring dove can look down as well as up; and the believer can look back at his state of degradation as well as onward to his hope of exaltation. It is not until he has passed from the pots, and sees their deformity in the light of the Lord, and with the eyes of a new nature, that he can really know how horrible it was. All Spirit-taught men grow continually in the knowledge of their past degradation. It may be that the past life was not darkly stained by any gross iniquity; all was fair enough outside; ordinary professors of religion would have laughed at the idea of "the pots;" but ah! the man whom the Holy Ghost teaches knows that his heart was "desperately wicked;" he will accept this word "degradation," and attach an ever-deepening meaning to it every year he lives.

Moreover, the sinner's position was one of *degradation estimated by God*. Man would have been more ready to own his degradation if he could have wrapped it up in his own bosom, and kept the secret of its existence to himself. What the natural heart rises most against is God's oversight of its iniquity. It knows, in spite of its wish that it were otherwise, that it has a connection with God, that it is in rebellion and antagonism to him, that it has marred his image, that it has outraged his attributes, and that he will deal with it according to its guilt. There is a shame in sin so deeply underlying the lowest depths of our nature, that it makes us wish to rid

ourselves of the oversight of One whose presence makes us ashamed. Man would care little about sin in the abstract ; what enrages him is its connection with God. He cannot get rid of that : he feels that it removes him to an immense distance from God, and yet that God is quite close to him ; and he flies to the poor resource of trying to shut out God from his thoughts. Man likes to live “ without God in the world.” (Eph. ii. 12.)

The believer has learned to be deeply thankful for the fact, that his degradation was estimated by God, — that fully, in all its length and depth, breadth and height, the Holy One surveyed his unholiness, and took note of the completeness of his alienation. So far from his wishing that God did not know so much, he is very glad that nothing is left unknown to him ; “ for now,” he says, “ God seeing what a thorough ruin I am will not merely repair, but wholly rebuild me ; he will form me anew in Christ Jesus. I need not fear that there remains anything in the background to qualify his offers of mercy. I am sure he will never say, “ I did not know thou wast so bad when I offered thee the gift of life.” He knows now that God will do his work thoroughly, and purge out all the leaven from his soul. He knows the great truth that he cannot make himself a whit better by any exertions of his own. He is willing that God should deal with him exactly as he sees best.

The position among the pots is one of *helplessness*. The poor groveller there cannot emerge unless he be taken thence. He knows his unfitness for heaven, he cries unclean, unclean ; but with all his crying he remains uncleansed.

We need not dwell longer here. If we know anything at all of divine things, we know all this. "Thou hast destroyed thyself" is the voice which sounds in our ears as well as in Israel's; blessed be God! in our ears also sound the words, "But in me is thy help." "But in me," — there is hope, yea there is certainty of restoration in God; but it must be in him and him alone. This is what is brought before us here. There is a "Though" and a "Yet"; the "Though" marking the sinner's ruin, the "Yet" pointing out the glorious results of his restoration. "Though ye have lain amongst the pots, yet shall ye be as the dove which is covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

This word "Though" brings God in action prominently before our minds; God seeing, "Though ye have lain;" "I know all about it; how long you were there, what the pots were like, how willingly you tarried there, how unworthy it was of you, how dishonoring it was to me; I knew all about it." And it also brings before us God feeling. "I have such compassion that all that cannot bar my pity for you. I know the misery of that estate, even though you do not. I do not contemplate you with indifference; I will not the death of a sinner, I would rather that he emerged from the pots and lived." In some such expressions as these we can imagine the most merciful One expressing his sentiments of pity, his feeling for the one whose soiling from the pots he would change for the splendor of silver and gold.

The action of God towards this poor creature is that of *profound benevolence*. The groveller amongst

the pots has not to make Him willing, but finds him so. The natural impulse of God's nature is to pity the sinner while he hates the sin. He cannot, consistently with his own nature, save man amongst the pots, but he can from amongst them; and this is what he does here.

The action is that of *power* also. God represents himself as able to deal with the state of the case; the transformation is complete; the power is shown in what he promotes man to, as well as what he saves him from. The whole operation is that of sovereign grace — grace of which He who shows it will not give an account to any man — grace which makes man hate his bondage, and come forth from it — which constrains him with influence from above, so that he can no longer tarry where he is. Is not ours the experience of St. Augustine? — “O Lord, I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid; thou hast broken my bonds in sunder. Let my heart, and tongue, and all my bones say, Lord, who is like unto thee? And do thou answer me, and say to my soul, I am thy salvation. Who and what am I? What evil am I not? Was it my will, or words, or deeds, that have done it? No; but thou, Lord, good and merciful, by thy powerful right hand delivered me from the depths of misery, and thoroughly cleansed the very bottom of my heart of all its corruptions. The whole of my evil lay in a will stubbornly set in opposition to thine. But where lay my free-will of old time, and from what deep secret was it called out in a moment, by which I bowed my neck to thy easy yoke, and my shoulders to thy light burden, Christ

Jesus, my Helper and Redeemer? How sweet was it, in a moment to be free from those delightful vanities, to lose which had been my dread, to part with which was now my joy! Thou ejectedst them, O my true and consummate delight, and thou enteredst in their room, O sweeter than all pleasure, but not to flesh and blood; clearer than all light, but to the inner man; higher than all honour, but not to those who are high in their own conceits. Now was my mind set free from the corroding cares of avarice, and ambition, and lust; and I conversed familiarly with thee, my light, my riches, my Saviour, and my God."

And, now, let us look at, —

WHAT GOD WILL MAKE THE POOR SINNER. He will take this dweller amongst the pots, and make him "like a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.

It is the design of God to elevate. This forms a part of his great plan; it enters into God's considerations of his own glory, and of man's true happiness. There are many who think merely about being saved, and an all-important thought it no doubt is; but salvation is a means to an end: we are saved that we may be elevated and ennobled, and glorify God, not only in the possession, but in the actings, also, of spiritual life.

There are, alas! only too many whose only care is to be saved; so as they escape hell, they care comparatively little for heaven; so as they get rid of the guilt of sin, they are little solicitous about getting rid of its life and power. Very little indeed have such persons entered into the mind of God; very

little do they understand either the design or the power of the cross. The cross of Christ is the greatest power that can be applied to the human heart; and when truly applied, it must elevate; none upon whom its stream has really flowed will be content with emerging from the pots; they must long for, and strive after, the glittering wings and unimpeded flight of the soaring dove. We know well that we are not saved because of any holiness we attain; and we know that however personally holy we may become, we cannot presume to stand in that holiness for a moment; that Christ's righteousness is all in all to us; still God's people are called to personal holiness, and are made holy ever more and more by the working of the Spirit, and they will be personally holy in heaven, and if they were not so, they could not be happy; and in proportion as we become holy, does heaven, in a sense, begin on earth; for the habits and character of that blessed place are all holy.

Let us keep distinctly before our minds the purpose for which we are saved; let us live in the power of this truth as regards the present and the future. It is a poor, mean thought, that all is right if we escape hell; we shall never have Christ's image formed in us if we tarry here. The mere escape of the back from the lash will never give the high impulses which throb in a real freeman's heart.

What, then, do we feel as regards the present? Is the truth that we are called to what is noble and grand operating upon us in our daily life? Are we thinking not only of what we shall be hereafter, but

of what we may be even now ? The present is, no doubt, full of many depressing influences ; but do we feel that we are to be elevated even now in our characters, and in the habits of mind with which we meet these influences ? When the Spirit of God is at work upon our hearts ; we always feel an uplifting influence that we may resist it ; there may be sore conflict in our hearts as the flesh strives against the spirit, we may even allow that flesh to conquer for a season, to our great discomfort and sorrow ; but the Spirit of God works nevertheless, and the object of his work is always to lift us up.

And it is upon the believer as a saved man that he so works, — as one not amid the pots, but lifted out from amongst them ; as one who, being delivered, has of right no more to do with them. If we remembered what we are delivered *from*, and what *for*, how powerfully would this consideration work upon us in our daily life ! We should say, “ I am called to holiness ; am I becoming holy ? I am called to shine as a light in the world ; am I indeed thus shining ? The life that I am called into is of as deep moment and as true reality as that which I am called out of.” Oh, how listless are many ! what negations are their lives ! how low are their apprehensions of the call of God ! they shine but little in the world, because they have caught but little of the light of heaven themselves. They have not entered into the power of a truth which would make the world take knowledge of them ; they have no power of impression, because they have no weight in themselves. May we see our shortcomings in this respect, — that ours is a holy

calling; that it is a calling, which, if responded to, must work upon others; and may we be able ever unceasingly to live in its joy, to shine in its light, and to work in its power.

As regards the future, also, believers should live in the power of this truth. If we reflected upon the destiny of God's people, — that theirs is a future all bright, all full of life, a soaring, glittering future, — how little should we make of the present; how many false notions would be corrected; how many too closely binding earthly ties would be loosened; what lofty conceptions should we have of the dignity and glory of being in Christ! We should often look up, often look on, if we thought of what our future had in store; then the home above would be ever counted our truest home, and the Friend above our truest friend, and the family above our truest relatives; for the stamp of eternity shall be upon them all; and so all of earth would be chastened and sobered, and put into its proper place. Our hearts would bound towards the future, instead of shrinking from it, if we realized that our great elevation is connected with it; and we should take with all patience the perishings of the outward and the visible, because of the great and certain glory of the unseen. We are then only rich, when we are so as regards the future as well as the present; when we are not eating the life out of our possessions in the very using; when there is no prospect to make the heart sink. Yes, the heart would long for the future when it realized, in even some faint degree, what God designs for it therein; and it would be humble and diligent in the

present, when it thought to how little after all has it attained.

Elevation then is God's design ; the very nobility of his nature and character necessitates this. He cannot be content with what is mean and poor and base in those he loves ; if he take them for himself, he must lift them into likeness to himself. But all is not to be confined to God alone. It is the part of grace and the workings of the Spirit to make us fall in with those intentions ; the people of the Lord are made willing in the day of his power. God teaches us to look upon the pots in the same light as that in which he himself views them ; we ever know most of the odiousness of sin, when we enter most into the beauty and holiness of God. Many a believer is distressed beyond measure because he is learning more and more how bad he is. Ah ! he forgets that he is learning how good God is ; his knowledge of himself is flowing forth from his knowledge of the Lord. He is learning about sin, not by experience, but by contrast ; he is being taught, not by the excess of darkness, but of light.

God then, by the working of his Spirit, makes us fall in with his views for our elevation ; and one of the very first teachings which we receive is that of the true nature and character of the pots. The worthlessness, the degradation, the defilement, the helplessness of which we have already spoken, are pressed home to the soul ; and it cannot rest in peace. It is of no use for the world, or the flesh, or the Devil to try and make us satisfied ; we cannot be so ; we do not want to be so. The question is not one

of accidental circumstances, but of fundamental incompatibility. Like the prodigal, we have come to ourselves; and we can no longer be deceived. We bethink us that there is such a place as our Father's house, and nothing can soften the contrast between dwelling there and lying amongst the swine. But what can we do for ourselves. We are bound down to earth; wherever we look the pots are to be seen; we have no strength to flutter out from them; we fain would do much, and yet find that we can do nothing at all. Ah! it is the blessed Spirit still at work. Grace cannot act until this process of self-depression is gone through; it may be done very quickly, or it may take a long, long time, while the poor sinner is groping about, and tumbling hither and thither, and making himself only still more black and wretched than he was before; but grace will carry out the work, and the poor tried and wearied soul has great longings put into it. "Oh!" it cries, "I can do nothing; would that God would do much." The answer of God to such a crying soul is, "I will do everything; I will do not only more than you deserve, but more than you desire. Thou shalt come forth from these pots, by utter separation from them, by lifting up above them; thou shalt be 'like the dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.'" That is the way of God's dealing with a poor soul; he puts great expectations into it; he spreads out a new sphere before it; he calls it "out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Pet. ii. 9.) He lifts it into a position surpassing anything it could have conceived; he

shows that the heart of man cannot imagine what the mind of God can plan, and the hand of God can do.

Now let us dwell on some of the thoughts suggested to us by the similitude of the dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.

The dove is associated in our minds with *purity*. It was appointed under the law for a sacrifice, and was the only bird applicable for such a sacred purpose; others there were which exceeded it in strength or in brilliancy of plumage, but the dove alone was accepted in sacrifice by God.

Now whether we consider the poor degraded one in his first awakening by the Spirit, or the believer in his restoration when he has fallen into sin, purity is one of the leading ideas presented to us. God is pure, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; and if he will have anything to do with the sinner, he must bring him into a state of conformity with himself. Be ye holy, for I am holy, is the law of spiritual relationship. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. vi. 18.) Our High Priest was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners;" the dove-like qualities were pre-eminently in him, — in him who was filled with the Spirit, that Spirit which descended on him like a dove; and we, the disciples, are called to be like our Lord.

This purity is not what man prides himself upon ; the ambitious soaring of the eagle, the unerring swoop of the hawk ; these and such as these are what he admires ; and it is upon the carrion, that is the natural food of such birds, that he will live. Nor is purity that which man will naturally seek after. His nature is to love sin ; in some cases, gross sin ; in some, its finer developments ; but sin in some form or some degree. The earnest longing for purity is the gift of God. Whether it come to us ere we have been lifted out of the pots, making us earnestly to desire deliverance, or after we have been dragged down into them for a season, making us to desire restoration, it is the motion of the Holy Ghost within the soul.

In all times, Spirit-taught men have sighed for purity ; they have cried to God for it ; they have striven after it ; they have fought the flesh for it ; they have loathed themselves for want of it ; and their bitterest griefs have been from failures in winning it. Ah ! how indeed shall we become pure ? How shall we get rid of defiling remembrances, of wayward fancies ; of the stage which Satan erects in our minds, and the actors, who only too well thereon perform their parts ? How shall we drive out unbidden guests which push themselves into the soul's upper seats, and penetrate into its most secret recesses, and diffuse themselves impalpably yet only too perceptibly through our being's innermost core ? Do we not sometimes feel in an agony because a cloud of locusts descends upon our soul, and threatens to leave no verdure there ? Where were these

evils bred? When did we learn them? When did we see them? From whom did we hear them? How do we come to understand them? What are they to us that they should hope to find tarrying ground and suitable food in our souls? Ah! every child of God knows only too well that he is impure; and the records of heaven are full of his cries, and groans, and longings to be free. But is this all? This, no doubt, is much; but it is not enough. The believer would be sorry if the work of grace stopped here. It cannot stop here; we are drawn from the pots to be beautified, and God by the Spirit is making us purer, and will make us finally altogether pure with himself. In the matter of acceptance we stand in the purity of Christ, just as in that of justification we stand in his finished work upon the cross; but as regards our moral fitness for heaven, the Holy Ghost is working upon his people day by day.

It may be that some poor tempted soul says, "Ah, but I am finding myself more and more impure every day!" Even so; and the reason that thou knowest about thy impurity is because thou art being made more pure. Yes, when our hearts were in their original state, impurity was natural to them; we did not shrink from it, because we saw nothing in it to shrink from; but now our shrinking is an evidence that we have new feelings; and what are these feelings, but the impulses to purity bestowed upon us by the Spirit.

As long as we live, we shall not be able to help Satan's injection of evil thoughts; nor shall we be able to prevent the impulses of the old man, the

flesh ; nor if we unhappily have bad scenes to remember shall we be able to help remembering them ; while we have imagination it will work, sometimes by association of ideas, and sometimes by its own unaided effort ; all this we cannot help ; but the soul's resistance to such evil, its effort against it, its distress at it, is the evidence of its purity. The steel cannot help being breathed upon ; but if it be pure and bright, it will throw off the breath ; and the moisture shall take no hold upon it, nor leave behind a taint of rust.

May we have given to us an ever-increasing perception of what we are called to, — of dove-like purity, — and an ever-increasing longing for it. A remembrance of what we are called to, as well as of what we have been saved from, will help us much by the power of the Holy Ghost ; we shall say, " This becometh not me ; this is incompatible with my character as one called to be holy ; it is unsuitable ; " and we shall flee the influence that would drag us down to the polluting pots again.

Another thought suggested to us by this promise is *acceptance*. The dove was a bird acceptable to God. He received it as an offering, and in its form the Spirit descended upon Christ.

The " lying amongst the pots " naturally excluded the idea of acceptance. " God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." There could be no fellowship with him while the soul lay in this valley of death.

There was no fellowship between the prodigal and his father, while he lay amongst the swine ; there can be none between us and God while we are amongst the pots

The heart is full of fears on this subject. From time to time there rise within it gloomy forebodings, distressing tossings to and fro, surmisings, and all the signs of disquietude and unrest. When the Spirit of God opens a man's eyes to his state by nature, and he sees the pots, and his own defilement from them, he says, "Can God ever accept me?" wherever he turns, there the pots meet him; whatever efforts he makes, he cannot disentangle himself from them; they have ingrained their filth into him, and he knows it; and he knows moreover that God knows it; and his heart shrinks and fears, and acceptance seems entirely beyond hope.

And this prospect of acceptance seems to recede farther, when the heart realizes something of the greatness of the change which the Spirit of God makes upon the soul. Many glimpses of this are experienced by men ere they come forth from the pots. They are like prisoners who, through thickly-barred windows, can see a ray of light falling on a distant harvest field, and faintly hear the song of the harvest home; or like wretched captives who, through one small chink, espy the coursing of a white sail over the waters; and have borne to their ears the murmurings of the summer breeze. Yes, there is an inward voice which speaks of how holy God is, and how "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," and, moreover, how all true and abiding happiness is connected with union with God; and the heart thinks, "How can I hope to attain to this: it is too much to look for?" And with this thought, Satan would sink it down into the pots forever. But

we are met with this image of the dove ; God turns our thoughts into a channel in which there is hope ; he says, “ Yet shall ye be ; ” and if he say, who shall hinder ?

God will do something for the one that cries to him from among the pots ; and if he do anything it must be to *make us acceptable to himself*. The dove was an acceptable bird, and we shall be as the dove. We, poor sinners in ourselves, are “ accepted in the beloved.” [Eph. i. 6.] We are not merely tolerated, we are received with an abundant acceptance ; we are made “ a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people ; ” a portion of the revelation of God’s glory is committed to us, “ that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” [1 Pet. ii. 9.] Immense evil would flow from our being merely tolerated by God. As regards God himself how could he ever delight in his people. They would be ever before his presence mere nonentities, they would stir no feelings in his breast ; it would be a matter of indifference to him whether they were in heaven or not. God is the father of his people, but he never could feel a paternal interest in those whom he merely tolerated. In heaven God will display himself in unclouded fatherhood ; there his people shall see what now they have to believe ; there he will fully pour into them the great outflowings of his love ; and how could all this consist with mere toleration.

But we must view this acceptance with reference to the present also. God’s people are even now an ac-

cepted people. It is Satan that puts the idea into their minds that they are merely tolerated. True! he has their sad shortcomings, and also their many falls, to help him in persuading them that they cannot aspire to more than toleration, and he tells them that they may be very thankful for that. But this depression is no less his doing, even though he work with materials which he finds within ourselves.

It may suit Satan's purpose not to depress a believer too much. In some cases if he were to say, "You are not belonging to God at all," the heart would throw off the temptation: it would say, "'I know in whom I have believed;' I have come, and I know that he that cometh shall in no wise be cast out.'" If Satan could cast such a soul into utter despair, no doubt he would try to do so, for this would be the fullest gratification that his malice could have; but failing this he will try the next best thing, and that will be the hindrance of the realization of comfort, and of the privileges flowing therefrom. Now the idea of toleration — mere toleration — suits this purpose of Satan admirably. God's glory is in the manifestation of his fulness, — fulness of mercy, of kindness, of love to the poor sinner; and the idea of fulness cannot enter into this poor, cold, meagre, half-starved thought of "toleration." This is one way that Satan has of robbing, and many a poor believer can say with tears in his eyes, "Ah, I know it only too well; I never have had such large, clear views of the wonders of His love, and of the Saviour's sacrifice, as to see myself rejoiced in by God." Alas! how few realize the joy that there is in heaven over one

sinner that repenteth. The prodigal is not received in moody, gloomy, silence with mere toleration ; the father falls upon his neck, and kisses him. There is the best robe for him ; there are shoes for his feet, and a ring for his hand ; and the fatted calf is killed, and a feast is made to celebrate the great event of the prodigal's return ; and he himself is at it. And surely everything declares a father's love just as plainly as if it were proclaimed by the sound of the herald's trumpet ; and this is the well-known image of the reception of every prodigal sinner that returns to God. There is an ecstatic joy, and also a deep flowing complacent joy. The first may by no means be abiding with the people of the Lord, but the second assuredly ought to be ; where we come short in it, it is because we do not know God enough.

We ourselves also are grievously wronged by substituting the idea of toleration for that of acceptance. So long as we take this low view of our relationship to God, we shall never feel *happy* ; we shall never have his peace ruling in our hearts ; we shall never enjoy the legitimate consequence of union with Christ. Nor shall we feel *safe* ; we shall go up and down in our feelings, not having penetrated into that depth in which the heart finds rest. Nor can we have *boldness*. The Lord Jesus Christ tells us that boldness is our privilege when he tells us to address God as "Our Father." The apostle shows us how in the blood of the Saviour we have a right to this boldness ; but it is impossible to have it, if we realize no higher position than that of toleration. Oh, how much we wrong God by considering him backward in his man-

festations of grace to us ; by acting towards him as if any kindness were wrung out of him. If indeed his mercies were wrung from him we can understand their never going beyond toleration ; but they flow forth spontaneously, and partake of the largeness of his own nature. “The gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many” transgressions. (Rom. v. 15.) “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” (Rom. v. 20.) “Accepted in the beloved, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” Eph. i. 6, 7.) It would be easy to multiply texts like these, all of which go to show that there is nothing niggard in God ; the closeness is in ourselves. He says, “open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” We only open a little, and taste distrustingly, what we ought to feed upon bountifully. We shall never get fat upon mere tastings ; perhaps it is to our own mistrustful reception of God’s love that we have to attribute present failings and present fears.

We see then here what we might describe as the fervency of God’s nature, his fulness, and how they are set forth to us in his reception of poor sinners under the similitude of a dove. Will it not be profitable to look at our reception of God’s grace, as well as our reception by his love ?

The fervency, the fulness, which he so freely bestows on us, without any claim or attractiveness of ours, he might well expect to be returned in our feelings towards him ; but, alas ! it is not. Our poor hearts painfully experience their deadness, their want

of spring and energy, even when they realize something of the greatness of this acceptable energetic love of God.

How often if God were extreme to mark iniquity, and to resolve the misdeeds of his people into their primitive elements, would he say to us, "Thou art only tolerating me, tolerating my law, tolerating my service, tolerating my commandments; thou hast little real heart for me or mine." Alas! what could we say? Our deadness in communion, our backwardness in action, everything, would rise up in testimony against us, and our own hearts would condemn us.

"Alas!" says Baxter in his "Dying Thoughts," "how often would Love have spoken comfortably to me, and I was not at home to be spoken with, but was abroad among a world of vanities, or was not at leisure, or was asleep, and not willing to be awaked! How often would Love have come in and dwelt with me, and I have unkindly shut my doors against him! How oft would he have been with me in secret, where he freely would embrace me, but I had some pleasing company or business which I was loth to leave! How oft would he have feasted me, and made all ready, but I was taken up, and could not come! Nay, when his table hath been spread before me, and Christ, grace, and glory have been offered to me, my appetite hath been gone or dull, and all hath been neglected by me, and hath scarce seemed pleasant enough to be accepted, or to call off my mind from lucious poison. How oft would he have shined upon me, and I have shut my windows

or mine eyes! He was jealous indeed, and liked not a partner. He would have been all to me, if I would have been all for him; but I divided my heart, my thoughts, my love, my desires, and my kindnesses; and, alas, how much did go besides him, yea, against him to his enemies, even when I knew that all was lost, and worse than lost, which was not his."

This mere toleration of God (with all reverence let the word be used) is very awful, — not awful *to* the world, though very awful *for* the world; for the world knows nothing about it, it is past feeling and has no perceptive power about the matter at all; but God's people feel it to be their sin, and they mourn bitterly over it. It makes them cry many a time, "Oh, wretched man that I am!" it causes heart-breakings and depressions; it makes them cry out, "Undertake for me, O Lord, for I am oppressed;" it makes them "groan, being burdened." They see somewhat of the awfulness of the slight thus put upon the most High; somewhat of the results which would follow if he dealt with them according to their sins, and left them to the legitimate fruits of their own coldness and deadness. They see also somewhat of the dire provocation which this is of the Lord; how day and night it cries against them; how all earthly developments of interest and energy, by contrast, manifest the want of energy in what pertains to God. Great indeed is God's patience with his own people; shall we not say that that patience is more shown in their case than in that of the world. Their eyes are in a measure open; they have tasted of the good things of the Lord; they have had

much given to them, and from them might much be required ; and now to think that they are such cold, dull beings in their affections and their developments ! This is sad indeed. Perhaps the greatest wonders of God's grace are seen in his bearing with the provocations of his people. And this bearing is long ; of more than Philip might it be said, " Have I been so long time with thee, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip ? of more than the Israelites might it be written, " Forty years long have I been grieved with this generation." His bearing of our narrowness towards him is quite as wonderful as his manifestation of his fulness towards us.

And what a want of harmony with the unseen world does our coldness manifest. The angels of God all serve him with the full outflowings of their natures ; their whole being springs forth in every act of service, every song of praise, every emotion of feeling ; the vibrations of their chants all come from strings wound up to a perfect pitch ; and the intensity of life is ever manifesting itself amongst them all. An unfervent singer amid their choirs would spoil the harmony, and make the minstrels of the skies discordant in the ears of God. There is no excitement in the unseen world, no fitfulness of effort, no spasm, no unseemly haste ; the fervency of spiritual life is too earnest to admit of these, which we too often mistake for fervency on earth.

Alas ! we are indeed out of harmony with the unseen world. We know it ; we feel it ; we grieve over it ; we many a time try to remedy it ; we now wind up one string and now another ; but they soon

run down again ; the damp of this cold world slackens them, and puts them out of tune. Yes ! our souls are conscious of this, and so we hang our harps upon the willows, and say with the Psalmist, " How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land ? " How many bitter vexations have we endured in our little efforts at harmonizing ourselves with the unseen world ? We have wound some strings with such a jerk, that they have snapped. When we had, as we thought, tuned each string, we found that though each seemed in tune by itself, they were not in tune one with the other ; and when we essayed to make melody before the Lord, we found that now one string and now another ran down even in the very using.

These are the experiences of God's people, and many a bitter sigh do they draw from their innermost hearts ; and in a measure it will be thus with them even unto the end. They have to carry about with them the infirmities of the flesh, and to live in a world that has a natural tendency to depress, distract, and damp ; and this would be enough in itself to account for their not being able to attain to all the fervency they desire. But there is another reason also. The other world is ever opening before them more and more,—that other world in its fervency, in its harmony, in its service to God ; and the more they attain to here, the more they see how little is attained to in comparison with what is there. There is always a vista beyond our present realization ; and the heart presses on to that, and deems itself backward until it be

reached. And so all God's people judge themselves; and the most advanced amongst them are the deepest in their realization and mourning over present deadness. Even in this carcase, however, some honey is to be found. How wonderfully the patience of God is developed towards his poor imperfect people. With the same glance he sees the fervency of angels and disembodied spirits, and the dulness of his people in the flesh; the readiness of the one, the unreadiness of the other, the power and the weakness, the flame of fire and the dull, smouldering coal are all before him together; and yet the poor feeble saints are not discarded. No! God does not allow the contrast to provoke him to slay us, though he does permit it to move him to discipline us, to blow up the coal, to exercise our stiffened limbs, to quicken us. All God's feelings turn to the blessing of his children; and there are no exceptions. Oh, what a God have we! whose thought is to bless, when it might so justly have been to curse.

But there are many of us who need chiding instead of comfort. Alas! how content are such with the world's measure of fervency; how preposterous they think it to expect to begin heaven upon earth. How little do they seem to know of the intensity of the divine life, of that life, which in point of fact they really have. There are disturbing elements, and depressing ones also to keep them back and keep them down; but their Father will deal with them all; and then they will mount heavenward, at least, in their desires; they will give full acceptance in their souls to an accepting God.

There is surely little need to say much of the loss which we incur by the want of our having towards God some measure at least of that fulness which he has so gloriously towards us. Our niggardliness of heart keeps us back from aspiring to blessing, from feeling the want of it, from earnestly seeking for it. It is because we are not full in our outgoings of heart to God, that the world has such hold of us, and such power to disappoint us, and that we attain so little to communion with him.

Nor let us deny the capacity of our nature, and deceive ourselves by thinking that, owing to the limitation of its powers, and the limited sphere in which it must now develop itself, it can of necessity mount no higher than it does towards God. Ah! we know if we examine ourselves aright, that we have never gone forth to God, even as far as our limited natures would permit. What are our experiences of earthly love? has our nature ever given forth its full capacity of loving to God? We know how full of fears and hopes, and confidence and tenderness, and endurance and strivings, and inward contemplations and outward actings, is love. Our love to those in the flesh, or who have been in the flesh, tells us that such do exist; and they moved us with mighty forces, secret as the magnetic current, or known and yet unknown as the storm wind, which, heard and yet not seen, cometh whence, and goeth whither, no man on earth can tell. And what has been the fulness of our love to God, compared with this all-powerful love to some being that he has made? And whence all this love but from the perception that we are loved, or, it may

be, even from only the hope that if we are known to love, we may be loved in turn again. Oh, what volumes does this speak to our poor backward souls! Whoever did for us what God has done? Who has accepted us with such a free outpouring of his nature? Who has enriched us with such personal wealth, as he has with his silver and his gold; and yet how few are there who can say, I have felt my love go out to him as keenly, as sensibly, as wondrously as ever it did—yes, more than ever it did—to any one of earth? Let us use our earthly experiences to teach us of heavenly things; and when we think of our fervency in them, oh, let it shame our want of fervency to God.

And what is said of earthly love will apply equally to earthly gain and admiration; they have gone forth with a fulness which, we shall see on close examination, has not characterized our longings after God, our admiration of all that belongs to him. All the energy of our past lives, of our present existence, reproach us with the littleness of our fervency to God. May we listen to their reproaches, hear their teachings, and give forth to the Lord our energy of being, even as he gave forth his energy of being in our redemption from death, our acceptance to life, our deliverance from the pots, and our being made like the dove. It shall be a great part of the glory of heaven and of its enjoyment that all will there pour forth the fulness of their natures towards God. Every one will praise, with a bounding heart; there will be life and energy in all conversations about Jesus, in all praises addressed to him. The heart's fires will need

no stirring ; they will burn evermore under the influences of the Spirit ; the north wind shall have awakened, and the south come, and blown upon Christ's garden, and the spices thereof now flow out. Oh ! that will be a blessed time indeed : we shall labor no more in our spiritual services, flag no more in their joys, be angry no more with ourselves for our stupidity and sloth. Nothing shall distract our attention ; nothing divide our love ; nothing drag down the soaring of our hearts : there will be ease, where now there is labor ; sight, where now there is faith ; praise, where now there is prayer. Then and not till then shall we know what a human heart is capable of ; how it can praise, how it can love, how it can rejoice ; it is to be in the presence of God, and therefore must have the intensity of life suited for the position which it holds ; the fulness of God to us shall have some approach to a worthy reflection, in the fulness of our heart's love and praise to him.

After rehearsing some of his troubles from sin and coldness, as we have read a few pages before, the holy Baxter looks forward to the removing of them all in glory ; to being able to love and praise as his heart earnestly desired. " In heaven I shall have none of those obstructions ; all old unkindnesses and ingratitude will be forgiven ; the great Reconciler, in whom I am beloved, will then have perfected his work. I shall then be wholly separated from the vanity which here deceived me ; my open soul will be prepared to receive the heavenly influx ; with open face I shall behold the open face of glorifying love ; I shall joyfully attend his voice, and delightfully relish

the celestial provisions. No disease will corrupt my appetite; no sluggishness will make me guilty again of my old neglects; the love of the Father, by the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, will have gotten the victory over all my deadness, folly, and disaffection; and my God-displeasing, self-undoing averseness and enmity will be gone forever. The perfect love which God doth first effect in me will be my everlasting receptivity of the fullest love of God. Benevolent love will make me good, that is, a holy lover of God; and then pleased love will make me his delight, and benevolence will still maintain me in my capacity." Truly, to heaven, and heaven alone, can we also look forward for the perfect outgoing of the heart to God.

Purity, then, and acceptance are brought before us by this image of the dove; so also is *lowliness in self*.

Doves were in themselves of small repute; it took two of them to make up even a very humble offering to the Lord: "a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons." (Luke ii. 24.)

This lowliness is of God, and not of the world. The doctrine of the world is, "If you want to be valued, make much of yourself;" the world will price you at the rate at which you price yourself. And yet, with a strange inconsistency, the world practically acknowledges how soft a charm is cast by retiring modesty over the highest attainments and the fairest beauty. It is not the beauty that meets us upon life's dusty road, and, like the highwayman, makes a peremptory demand upon us to "stand and deliver," that wins our heart; it is that which, like

the violet, hides itself from every common gaze, and yet, by an unmistakable charm thrown around, makes us search until we penetrate the secret of what could diffuse so much delight.

This lowliness, with its natural consequence of retiredness and true modesty, is not inconsistent with the possession of the truest beauty; far from it. Those who know what real beauty is will turn from the bold, unblushing possessor of little better than meretricious charms to dwell upon equal beauty, enhanced by the soft atmosphere which floats around it, and brought out into that beautiful relief for which shadow is necessary as well as light. The plumage of the dove has a charm of its own; if we could read its teachings aright, we should have some of the graces of heaven adorning us even here upon the earth.

Is lowliness, indeed, to be found in heaven? Yes, the dovelike character is there found on all.

When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filling the temple, "above it stood the seraphim; each one had six wings; and with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly." Four out of the six were used in the service of lowliness, as well indeed they might be, in the presence of the Holy God. "When those beasts (living creatures) give glory and honor and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four-and-twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever; and cast their crowns before the throne,

saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." (Rev. iv. 9-11.) The great multitude which no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues, which stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and with palms in their hands, cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb; and all the angels which stand round about the throne and about the elders, and the four beasts, fall before the throne on their faces and worship God, saying, Amen: blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be unto our God for ever and ever, Amen. (Rev. vii. 9-12.) When the Lord is about to honor his people, and reward them for even the cups of cold water which they have given to his servants in his name, and for his sake, "then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred and fed thee?" etc.; there is no magnifying of their service; they seem to shrink from the disproportion of the reward.

And can we for a moment suppose that the saints or high estates of heaven would be allowed to possess any characteristic save that which was precious in itself, and precious in the sight of God? Surely not! their self-emptiness prepares them for being filled with God himself; God would allow none to be eternally before him except such as are what he approves. Well, then, may we choose for one of our chief characteristics that which is a part of the adornment of

even the highest of the angels before God ; well may we believe that we shall have no loss thereby. The "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" is in God's sight of great price ; the willingness to judge ourselves worthy only of the lowest place is preparatory to hearing the approving words, "Friend, come up higher ;" the last shall be first as well as the first last.

We can see how, even here on earth, the lowly spirit of the dove brings with it its own reward. How many heart-burnings and heart-breakings are escaped by the lowly in heart ! They can bear being passed by ; they are untorn by the bitter vexations and disappointments which fall so often to the lot of those who seek great things and great places on the earth ; they have the peace which the proud heart that thinks itself unappreciated never can have. God's people may be sure that he has marked out for them the way of truest peace, when He tells them, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." Mortified pride inflicts upon man some of the deepest wounds which he is capable of receiving, and when he smarts under them he has no alleviation ; he has brought them upon himself ; he was engaged in a strife to which he was not called, yea, one in which he was forbidden to engage ; and now he has himself to thank for his woe. If we examined closely the precepts which God has given his people we should see, that they are something more than mere arbitrary commands ; they contain the truest rules for our happiness. Man's happiness and

God's glory are so bound up together that they cannot be separated ; nothing can be for our true happiness which is contrary to his glory. And yet how hard is it for us to realize this, especially in this matter of lowliness, this assumption of the characteristic of the dove. Present advantages blind us ; the race of competition sweeps us on. "Keep in the foremost rank," cries the world, "or you must be trodden down ;" "put forth your strength and elbow on your way, or you must be driven to the wall ;" "get what the world values, or the world will think nothing of you ;" these are what we continually hear, harassing and disturbing and sucking us towards the fatal centre of the maelstrom of life. The vortex is a fatal one ; may we have grace to keep outside its charmed influence ; its circles are ever narrowing as we sail round. That is a fatal ring, however wide its circumference, the centre of which is death.

But we are more concerned, at present, with the spiritual benefits of this dovelike lowliness. Wherever there is this blessed realization, there, there is judgment of "self" as unworthy, and so there is an emptying of "self," which always brings with it an inpouring from God. What an emptying of self there was in the case of the prodigal, who was willing to be accounted a servant in his father's house, and what an inpouring in the gift of the ring, the robe, the shoes, and the killing of the fatted calf ; what an emptying there is in hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and what a thorough blessing in being filled ; indeed the only limit to God's inpouring is our outpouring. He is always ready to fill us with

himself; the inflow is stopped by something in ourselves. God in mercy often brings us low, just that we may be more emptied of "self" and that there may be more room made for him.

Then there is the rest of being in the right position. When things are out of their proper place, they are unsightly, or useless, or perhaps both; when people are out of their proper place they are generally a trouble, not only to those about them, but also to themselves. Now man brings about his own unrest by not occupying the place which God assigns to him. He is intended to be an humble recipient of blessing; and when he goes out of his place, and supposes that he has a *right* to receive good things, or when he seeks to occupy in his own merit a high position, then, if he be a mere man of the world, he receives the worldling's portion of unrest; if he be a child of God, he receives chastisement, and is brought low. When we are troubled, we shall often find that the cause is our being in a wrong position, our aiming at some piece of self-exaltation. It is in mercy to our souls, and to give us peace, that God puts us down. When he assigns us lowliness of character, he marks out for us precisely that disposition in which we shall have most true happiness and peace.

And what a blessing it is to escape from chastisement! No doubt this chastisement yieldeth in the end the peaceable fruits of righteousness, but, certainly for the present it is not joyous, but grievous; and it is doubly grievous when we have the bitter mortification of seeing that we have brought it upon ourselves. This is no dealing of God sent to us for the

sole purpose of our spiritual exaltation ; it is one sent to punish us, and put us down, and set us in our proper place. We have simply ourselves to blame for it ; we are reaping fruit from seed which we ourselves have sown.

Let us, then, dear reader, cultivate by God's grace the lowliness from which so much blessing flows.

To know its exceeding preciousness in the sight of God, and its usefulness to ourselves, we must be taught in the school of Christ ; but he will surely teach us, if we be willing to learn. He humbled himself, and took upon him the form of a servant ; he commends his yoke to us, by the fact of his being meek and lowly ; he will help every one who desires to be made like him. Lowliness is perhaps the hardest of the Christian graces to which to attain, but with God nothing is impossible ; and he can easily give us the childlike heart, and with it the children's blessing. God can make us like the dove, which is "covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

Helplessness in self is another point very distinctly brought before us by this image of the dove. To the world, with its short-sightedness and pride, this is, no doubt, anything but an agreeable subject ; but the people of God can look into it steadily, and that with great profit and peace. They know that they are helpless in self ; but they also know that they are not helpless altogether, for they have all they want abundantly in God.

It is not difficult to see why God will have an intrinsically weak people. The consciousness of weak-

ness goes far to abate that pride which is so odious to him, so fatal to us. When his Spirit keeps us in the consciousness of weakness, it keeps us in the way of blessing; the flesh must be silent if the voice of the Lord is to be heard. It is with a weak people, and to a weak people alone, that God can show his perfections. If man has anything of his own that he thinks of value, he is sure to thrust it forward, to seek to have it noticed, to make it share in the admiration which ought to be the Lord's alone. The most unbroken manifestation of God is given in the man that is most conscious of helplessness in self. And this helplessness in "self" God often teaches his people through many failures. If men will try what they can do, he lets them, just as he did the Israelites. (Num. xiv. 42.) If nothing but the experience of failure will teach, then that experience they shall have. Perhaps some reader has had experiences in this way. God could not manifest himself in you, until he had manifested you to yourself. He has to make the mirror to reflect the light, as well as to shine with the light itself. We think of manifesting ourselves; God thinks of manifesting himself in us. When Israel was delivered from Egypt, they were a helpless company; they came forth from the pots with no more intrinsic strength than the dove; when they were delivered from the Midianites, the Lord said unto Gideon, the people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, mine own hand hath saved me. They are yet too many, said the Lord, even though two-and-twenty

thousand had returned ; and only ten thousand now remained ; and at last the number was reduced to three hundred before the Lord would act.

What teaching there is for us in this little word “yet ;” how does it explain the mystery of many a dealing of God with ourselves. We are made to pass through many humbling and weakening dispensations before we are brought low enough for God to manifest himself. Hence, no doubt, come many of the emptyings of God’s people ; hence one loss, one affliction follows another ; hinderers to the Lord’s glory are being removed.

Nor must we limit our view to that which immediately concerns God ; in this, as in all arrangements, the truest good of his people is provided for. The Lord means them thus to gain an amount of victory which they never could have attained to in themselves. What match were they for Satan ? Even supposing that they had great abilities and great spiritual acquirements, these never could equal what were possessed of the Devil ; the victories they won with them must have been meagre and partial indeed. Perhaps they might have attained to the low standard which their untaught minds would have deemed high enough ; but what could they have done when God set his standard before them ? It is the setting of this standard before us that teaches us our helplessness ; we see we can reach forth but little towards this goal ; then we cry to the Lord ; we say, “ O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me ; ” and God leads us to that higher victory which we should never have thought of but for him, and which we never could

have won, had he not made his strength perfect in our weakness.

Perhaps there is no point in which God has more plainly to deal with the heart than in that of its actual spiritual attainment. We often look to the amount of grace we have received, and not direct to God himself, in our conflicts with Satan ; sometimes we are looking to it instead of Christ for comfort. God will teach us our helplessness here, — that it is to nothing in self, but to him, in Jesus, his Son, that all is to be attributed. “ When my poor heart,” says that eminent man of God, the Rev. W. H. Krause, “ is brought to feel its entire dependence upon Christ, as well as its constant need of Christ, I feel happy. When I begin to look for something good in self, either to make use of, or to give me peace, then I am and must be disappointed ; and I hope I shall always be so, for this is being independent of Christ. I do not know how it may be with others, but I feel that I should be in utter despair, I should be completely paralyzed, if I were thrown upon myself for comfort ; or upon my own resources for the maintaining of the conflict in which I am engaged. I have literally nothing of my own, and therefore I am obliged to say, ‘ Undertake for me ’ (Isaiah xxxviii. 14) ; and in this way I am kept up, and I would desire to rejoice in the resources I have in Jesus.” Let us be assured of how truly noble are the thoughts which God has toward us ; what great things he designs for us ; and then, instead of thinking our helplessness a loss ; we shall count it a gain ; for through it we shall be led in the strength of the

Lord to a height of victory which could never be attained by the greatest strength of man.

Let us remember that ours is the dependence of love; there is nothing dishonorable in it; it is the leaning of children upon their own parents; it is our casting ourselves upon our Father that is in heaven. We are only fulfilling the order of the spiritual relationship, and seeking the benefits which naturally belong to it. It is surely not dishonorable for the child to seek protection from a father's hand.

And much need is there of keeping this helplessness continually in view. Unless we do so, we get out of connection with God; we start on our own resources; we think to do or to endure in strength which we feel, or fancy we feel, we have. We do not intend to act sinfully; on the other hand, we want to please God. We want to show him what we will do for him, or what we will bear for him; and all the while we are going the very way to offend him. How mercifully has he often dealt with his well-meaning but presumptuous and ignorant children! Instead of cutting us off, he has taken us in hand to teach us, and has enabled us to do great things, and to show our love when he had set us on a right foundation. He poured in a blessing as soon as he had emptied us of self.

Many of our deepest depressions come from our not keeping our own helplessness in view. We have put forth all our strength; we feel that we can do nothing more, and yet there is failure. What wonder if we be distressed; we think over the matter; we try whether we have left any means unused; we

are perplexed, for everything ought to have gone right; but there was a fault though we perceived it not, and that was the non-realization of our own helplessness. Had we remembered that failure is all that can be looked for from self, we should have looked away to Christ, and escaped the discipline of defeat. We thus bring upon ourselves the helplessness of depression; perhaps, for a season, even the prostration of despair, — an unwholesome helplessness, far, far removed from that filial feeling in which we should have found strength and peace. We wanted to make ourselves out to be eagles, when in reality we were doves.

Seeing then that this sense of helplessness is of God's appointment and so wholesome for the soul, let us never be frightened at the contemplation of it. If God has appointed it for us, then we may rest assured it is that which is most for our truest good.

Let us not think that this only suits beginners in Christ, and let us not aim at growing out of it and gradually becoming independent; the believer never grows, or can grow, out of this state. He may no doubt become very strong in Christ, and very conscious of being so by grace; but it will be "in Christ," and the more he knows of his standing in Jesus, and his strength in him, the more will he know of what kind is his standing in himself, and the weakness belonging to it.

Lastly, let us think of the great sweetness of invoking the tenderness of God. Our weakness, when it is represented to him, draws out all the love and tender thoughtfulness of his nature; it moves his pity;

it works upon him to enter into our case, and do all that it requires: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." (Ps. ciii. 13.) The moment we present ourselves before him in an attitude of need, in humility, in contrition that moment his tender mercies are ready to flow forth. This was his dealing with Ephraim. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn thou me and I shall be turned, for Thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was returned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, even confounded, because I did not bear the reproach of my youth." What can be more tender than the quick response of God: "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him saith the Lord." (Jer. xxxi. 18-21.) Yes! we may calculate largely upon the tenderness of God; upon the quickness of the motions of his mercy; we may believe that it will make him feel for all our needs, whether they arise from great dangers or from little wants. Let us not forget to throw ourselves upon his tenderness as a father, in the smaller, but perhaps more irritating, needs of life! "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matt. vi. 32), and in his tenderness let us find our peace. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things."

(Rom. viii. 32.) Our helplessness is a preliminary to his mercy.

Like John Newton, may we be *willing to be helped*. "I believe," said he, "it was about three months before her (his wife's) death, when I was walking up and down the room, offering disjointed prayers from a heart torn with distress, that a thought suddenly struck me, with unusual force, to this effect: The promises of God must be true; surely, the Lord will help me, *if I am willing to be helped!* It occurred to me that we were often led, from a vain complacency in what we call our sensibility, to indulge that unprofitable grief which both our duty and our peace require us to resist to the utmost of our power. I instantly said aloud, 'Lord, I am helpless indeed in myself, but I hope I am willing, without reserve, that thou shouldst help me!'

"It had been much upon my mind, from the beginning of this trial, that I was a minister, and that the eyes of many were upon me; that my turn of preaching had very much led me to endeavour to comfort the afflicted, by representing the gospel as a catholicon, affording an effectual remedy for every evil, a full compensation for every want or loss, to those who truly receive it. So that though a believer may be afflicted, he cannot be properly unhappy, unless he gives way to self-will and unbelief. I had often told my hearers that a state of trial, if rightly improved, was, to the Christian, a post of honor, affording the fairest opportunity of exemplifying the power of divine grace, to the praise and glory of the Giver. It had been, therefore, my frequent, daily

prayer, that I might not, by impatience or despondency, be deprived of the advantage my situation afforded me of confirming, by my own practice, the doctrine which I had preached to others; and that I might not give them occasion to apply to me the words of Eliphaz to Job, chap. iv. 4-5, 'Thy words have uphelden him that was falling, and thou has strengthened the feeble knees; but now it is come unto thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled!' And I had not prayed in vain; but from the time that I so remarkably felt myself *willing to be helped*, I might truly say, to the praise of the Lord, my heart trusted in him, and I was helped indeed. Through the whole of my painful trial I attended all my stated and occasional services as usual, and a stranger would scarcely have discovered, either by my words or looks, that I was in trouble. Many of our intimate friends were apprehensive that this long affliction, and especially the closing event, would have overwhelmed me; but it was far otherwise. It did not prevent me from preaching a single sermon, and I preached on the day of her death."

But now let us look at the wings of this dove; and consider some of the thoughts which are suggested to us by the silver and gold spoken of here. "Though ye have lain amongst the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove which is covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

The first thought which suggests itself to us here is that of a *combination of beauties*, — gold and silver. All God's works, when closely looked into, exhibit

combination in their construction, in their utility, in their beauty. The revelations of the microscope all manifest this; and, as far as the researches of the telescope reach, they do the same; and in truth this wonderful combination is to be discerned, even by our limited faculties, in God himself. True he is an uncompounded Being, an essence in himself; but his character is a compound one; and it is by that character we know him; his goodness, and mercy, and justice, and power, etc. All these attributes are glorious; they form a combination of beauties; and he who can read God's dealings aright, can see the development of his character in his dealings, whether of mercy or judgment, with the children of men.

But the great manifestation of God is in Christ; and surely we can see a combination of beauties in him. He was God shining forth in man; in him there met in full perfection the silver and the yellow gold. "I find in him no fault at all," was the testimony of the heathen judge; even the negative side of his character was perfect to one who knew him not; but how far more beautiful was the positive to one who knew him; whose testimony concerning him was this, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. ii. 3-9.)

Let us read the glowing description of the New Jerusalem in Rev. xxi, the city of God's building, and all the powers of language are exhausted to give us an idea of the combination of beauties there. The building of the wall of it was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass; and the founda-

tions of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third a chalcedony, the fourth an emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth a topaz, the tenth a chrysoprasus, the eleventh a jacinth, the twelfth an amethyst." These are in themselves a glorious combination, but to them are to be added the twelve gates of twelve pearls, and the streets of pure gold, and the glory and honor which the kings of the earth do bring into it, and the glory and honor of the nations, all lit up by the splendor of unearthly light; for "the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

And if we turn from this glorious sight to that melancholy one in Ezek. xvi, where God found the wretched infant cast out to die with every circumstance of misery in the open field, what did he bestow upon it but a combination of beauties? He did not content himself with simply saving it, or giving it what was barely necessary for its life; he dealt magnificently with it, from the crown of gold upon the head, down to the sandals of badger's skin upon the feet. "I anointed thee with oil; I clothed thee also with brodered work, and shod thee with badger's skin; and I girded thee about with fine linen; and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thine hands, and a chain on thy neck; and I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful

crown upon thine head." This beauty was "perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon thee saith the Lord." What greater combination of beauties and of treasure and wealth could we have than that recorded here! But we need not be surprised at it. God had been putting forth his hand; and when he gives there is no stint.

How seldom do we see combined beauties both of body and soul upon earth. The fairest jewels are sometimes enclosed in poor unsightly cases; and many a time the loveliest face and most gracefully rounded form are the handsome setting off of a distorted soul.

So far as the body goes, the combination of the believer's beauties cannot be perfected until the resurrection day; then what is sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption, and what was sown in dishonor shall be raised in glory. For that time we may well wait; its glory will more than repay for many a slight endured from others, for many a pang endured within ourselves.

But even here and now, God wills that the one whom he delivers from the pots should have a combination of spiritual beauties. This we far too often forget. We seek attainment only in one or two particulars,—in all probability in the virtues which are the opposite of our naturally besetting sins. These are most prominently brought before our notice, and we turn all our spiritual energy towards them. But God wills not that the attention of his people should be thus limited; even here he would see a combination of spiritual beauties in his people.

See what a combination St. Peter speaks of, when he says, "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity." (2 Peter i. 5, etc.) See also what a combination St. Paul speaks of in Eph. vi, when piece by piece he mentions the whole armor of God, and tells the believer to put it on; and in Phil. iv. 8, when he says, "Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." And what is "the fruit of the Spirit? Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance," — what, but the combination of beauties which comes to the believer through the Holy Ghost?

How does this speak to us, and say, "Be not satisfied with poor, low attainments, or with improvement in some main particulars of Christian character and life. Whenever thy Lord looketh upon thee, he would see himself reflected in thy soul; from all parts of his garden, he would have the spices to flow forth. Yes, he would see beauty in all lesser as well as greater things; in the silver as well as the gold, for in all he would see this reflected image of himself; he will have his Church without spot or blemish or any such thing." And how can this precious combination be brought about? Only by our having the

image of Jesus Christ formed in us. All that we have of any worth is by the Spirit's work within us reproducing the image of Jesus: "the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." (Col. iii. 10.) Here, alas! even in his best estate, there is but a poor combination of beauties in believers, but hereafter it shall not be so. Then we shall "be like him, for we shall see him as he is;" the beauties that shone in him shall shine in us; nothing will be too small so as to have been overlooked; nothing too great so as not to have been attained. Whatever shall be the capacity of our nature, according to that capacity shall we be filled and perfected. Our head,—even Christ Jesus will give us, his members, to combine in ourselves what combined so gloriously in himself. Then shall God be well pleased indeed with his people; then shall they be attracted to each other with the certainty that there is no element of repulsion to be feared; they will not fear lest they may know too much of each other, as we have so much reason to dread here on earth. The combination of beauties in the believer will make up perfection, just as the prismatic rays make up a perfect sunbeam. Analyze each saint, and you will find beauty; combine what you have analyzed, and you will find the same; what appear to be the most opposite graces will blend harmoniously into each other, for their colors shall have been laid on by a Master's hand. It seems much to expect all this; but is it not for this we have been delivered from the pots; and shall we allow ourselves to limit the mighty power of the Holy Ghost? Let

us say, "O my Lord, I yield myself to thee now to make me what thou wilt on earth : O Lord, I look to thee to perfect me forever." Well says Massillon, "A single ray of Thy glory shall change to purest gold this soul of earth ;" and this ray shall shine ; and we shall shine in it ; and we take up the expecting words of the old German hymn, and sing its words of hope and brightness : —

"With that holy throng uniting,
Then what rapture shall be mine !
In the Sun's bright beams delighting,
I, too, like the stars shall shine.
Amen ! glory be to Thee,
Thanks and praise eternally !" *

Combination of treasures and value is here suggested to us, as well as that of beauties. "Silver and gold," the two most precious metals, unite their worth in the adornment of the one rescued from the pots. God makes his people very valuable ; valuable to himself, valuable in themselves. As we have already incidentally mentioned, he makes them combine within themselves the greater and the lesser, — excellence in the points of character which are more prominent, and those which, to ordinary sight, do not seem so important. The Church is to be presented without spot or blemish, or any such thing ; the little foxes that destroy the vines are to be destroyed.

It is thus perfect that God's people are to be presented to him in glory, the King's daughter is to be "all glorious within" — all that is of real worth is to

* Theodore Schenk.

be found in her. And this, surely, should lead us to seek even here to have some of this wealth of silver and gold. The character for heaven begins on earth; the silver and gold which shall shine in fullest glory there ought to begin to show their brightness here. And so they would if we attached to holiness of character, and the formation of Christ within us, the idea of exceeding value. This gold is very pure; yellow or greenish gold; something better than the alloyed metal that passes current upon earth, and answers man's purposes well enough; for what God will see upon his people, yea, what he will give them is the very best.

We must set this idea of value prominently before our eyes; we must look for our riches as the world does for its; we must prize them highly; we must admire them greatly; when we attain to them, we must look upon them as real gain; when we suffer loss, we must look upon it as real loss. But our riches are to be within ourselves; seen, no doubt, by our outward actings amongst men, but known most and best to ourselves and God; they are all those beauties of which we have already spoken, the value of which cannot be known until they are seen in the light of eternity. Alas! how short we now come in our appreciation of this heavenly wealth; we do not put a true value upon the growth of Christ's image within us; we are often diverted by something of apparent price on earth, and thus we suffer loss. Our efforts become weakened; our desires languish; we become, perhaps, careless to some extent, and thus we suffer loss; how often have we been brought

to our senses by God's showing us that our earthly gold and silver, and things of exceeding price, were only withered leaves, and by his letting us see how thieves had broken in upon our true wealth to steal. Happy are we that we have a Father to deal with, who can restore our wealth again, and burnish anew the metals dimmed by the fogs and mists of earth.

Let us mark, also, *the power of dazzling reflection* possessed by this dove. The wings of the one that had been amongst the pots are covered with silver and gold. These metals can reflect the light with dazzling brightness.

All the glory of the saints is reflected glory. Even if they possessed ever so much silver and gold in themselves, it would yet be all dull and dead, unless shone upon by the Sun. "I counsel thee," says Jesus (in Rev. iii), to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed." Whatever the soul has of worth comes from him, and shines by him.

God is, undoubtedly, pleased with any measure of holiness which his people possess on earth, but it is because it reflects the holiness of his Son ; and God will be pleased with the perfect glory of his people in eternity, because it will perfectly reflect the glory of their Lord. What an honor to be allowed to reflect our Lord ; to be delighted in by God ; to have his eye rest upon us with pleasure and delight. Now, many of our heart-fears, from time to time, arise from surmisings that God is not pleased with us, from thoughts that we have come short of his glory, from a sad consciousness that, if we have not actually dis-

honored, we have, at least, not worthily honored him before men ; but by and by all these heart-sinkings shall be done away with ; we shall know that we reflect our Saviour's brightness ; we shall see that God is pleased with us and glorified in us ; a part of the glory of heaven will be produced by our reflection of our Lord.

Seeing, then, that so much glory here and hereafter is attached to our reflection of our Lord, let us present a full surface to him, on which to act. Let us expand all the soul to him, and beg of the Father, by the Spirit, to let the light of Jesus in its strength shine upon our whole being. We are too backward with Christ ; we do not, as it were, let out our whole being to him ; if we have wings we keep them folded to our sides, instead of expanding them to him.

Let us also keep in his presence and light. Unless we keep in the rays of the sun, we cannot expect to shine. Ah, how often we are content with twilight ! We hold ourselves back from Jesus ; we do not come closely into his presence ; we do not live in it ; and, consequently, we lack such evidences as reflections of his light would give.

Moreover, let us beware of allowing objects of various kinds to intervene between our Lord and us, and so eclipse his light. We have had sad experience of the power of many things to do this, and we have gone on for many days dark ourselves, and dark to those around us. The natural tendency of everything of earth is to hide out God ; to get above us, and not to keep beneath us ; and once it gets above it must come between us and him.

This reflected glory is alone destined to be permanent. All earthly glory fades like grass before the scythe, vanishes like the dew before the sun, descends into a tomb, from the dust of which no one cares to draw it forth ; but the reflected glory of the redeemed is to be forever, — eternal, like their presence with their Lord.

The dove is possessed not only of powers of dazzling reflection, but also of those of *flight*. It may be that we know but little of this. Perhaps we are at the best only fluttering ; making much labored effort, and accomplishing but very little after all. Well, this is our loss, but it does not hinder the truth that God means his people to soar upward upon pinions not only beautiful, but strong. If we rightly use our wings, we shall look *down* upon the pots ; looked at from above they will appear in their true color, black as night itself ; they will be “those things whereof ye are now ashamed.” (Rom. vi. 21.)

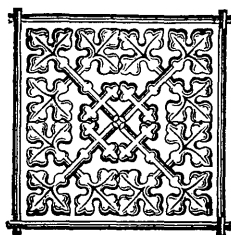
And what is our present estimate of the past ; have we perceptive powers with reference to it ; can we in any measure estimate it aright ? We may in some degree form an estimate of our present position by what we think of our former one.

Are we untrammelled, unclogged ? for this is necessary for lofty flight. Ah ! let us beware of binding ourselves down to a mere fluttering on earth, when God calls us to high communion with himself. Our trammels may be threads of silver and gold, — wife, husband, children, friends ; yes, even holy things themselves ; may we have grace to shake ourselves loose from all, so far as they keep us from God’s presence, or hide him from our view.

And have we not here suggested to us the idea of *the enjoyment of a pure atmosphere*. The dove passes away beyond the smoke and soot, and all the tainting influences of its former sphere. To find this, we must soar indeed above the atmosphere of the world. Where men most crowd, there is most smoke, most disease, most taint; we shall find the atmosphere for the soul purer, clearer, the higher we soar, the nearer we approach to God. Oh, how many of God's children long and sigh for purity! how "they groan, being burdened!" how they feel choked by a foul atmosphere which forces itself into their lungs! how they long for more holiness, more nearness to God! If we will have this indeed, then let us approach in faith. He gives us the power of rising; he bids us mount upward; he will help us so to do. And, if only we have grace to rise high enough, what freedom we shall have from many of those impediments which sorely vex us now! The higher we mount, the more shall we overcome the power of the earth's attraction. That, in itself, is one great point gained, and all the little hedgerows which form the separations of saint from saint shall disappear, and we shall know what true freedom means,—freedom before God; the unobstructed power of unfettered life.

Glory, then, be to God, who delivers our souls from the pots; who energizes and enriches them; who brings them unto his presence, so that, being set free by the Son, we are free indeed! (John viii. 36.) Glory be to the grace that remembers not against us our former low estate, but calls us up into the light and liberty of heaven even now, giving us foretastes

of its perfect light and liberty hereafter ! Let us be full of joy that we are given these wings ; let us be full of holiness that we may, with the burnished brightness of their silver and gold, reflect the image of our Lord ; he who purchased us must have us ; for we were rescued from degradation, and adorned with beauty, that we might be to his praise forevermore.





V.

And.

"Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink." — LUKE xvii. 8.

THIS is just one of those sayings of our Lord, which, while answering the present purpose looks far onward, and opens out deep and wondrous truth.

The two particulars to which our attention is to be directed are, —

I. The probable meaning of this text as spoken here; and, —

II. The deep actual truth which it contains; for deep and momentous truth is hidden beneath the surface of this passage; truth which tells the servants of the Lord what is their duty now, and what hereafter shall be their reward, — now must we gird ourselves and serve, — hereafter shall we eat and drink.

What, then, is the probable meaning of this similitude, or parabolic saying, as found in this particular place?

The connection in which it stands to what has gone before appears to be this: offences will come; trespasses will be committed; there will be a heavy demand made upon you, both for faith and patience. This was a gloomy prospect, and the apostles said unto the Lord, "*Increase our faith.*" Our Lord, in answer, shows the power of real faith. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamore-tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you." Then he goes on to show that their position would be such as to require the exercise of faith; that they were not now to have ease and peace; ploughing, and feeding, and serving, was to be their duty in the service of their Lord; and hereafter they were to rest, and eat, and drink. Jesus himself was to fulfil his life of toil, and enter into his rest (though not to his perfect glory); but his servants were to remain behind in girded service to him. In long-continued patience and endurance they were to do their work;* and, when their last act of service

* Upon the patience required in the service of disciples, Steir makes the following observations: "The discourse does not refer to hired *μισθίοις* or *μισθωτοῖς* to whom Rom. iv. 4, applies, but to servants who, either by birth or purchase, are the personal property of their master, whom he *hath* or possesses; who could only demand for all their labor their meat and drink, in order that they may be able to perform that labor. In that case *each* man must unhesitatingly perform the duty devolved upon *himself* (*τα δὲ ἀπαρχθὲντα*, verse 10); the ploughman not desiring the herdsman's duty, nor the reverse. This is the obvious reason why two are mentioned; the one having a harder, and the other a comparatively easier, duty; for the herdsman, especially the careless and idle one, might seem to the ploughman to have an enviable place. It is for you only to perform faithfully and patiently the duty incumbent upon each. Count it not your chief concern to accomplish great things by strong faith, to celebrate glorious victories during a short warfare, to be suddenly followed by triumph; but the great point is an *unwearied continuance* throughout the whole day's labor, fully and righteously measured out," etc.

was performed, "afterward," said our Lord, "*thou shalt eat and drink.*"

This seems the probable connection of the passage ; and now let us consider, —

The glorious and the solemn truth which it contains. It is summed up in two words: "SERVICE AND REWARD." And what, first of all, are we taught here, but this, that *the service of Christ's people must be continuous?* The servant who had been ploughing and feeding cattle in the fields does not end his day's work there ; he has to gird himself, and serve in the house. Out of doors, abroad, and in-doors, at home, he must be in service to his Lord.

Now we cannot but see that many who profess to be the servants of Christ are in no manner of service to him, either at home or abroad ; they do their business in life ; they serve their families, or themselves, as the case may be ; but they serve not Christ. Such persons are often very angry at its being supposed for a moment that they are not Christ's servants ; but, surely, they ought to be able to tell us how, when, and where they serve ; why their most intimate friends, their own children and servants, who live with them, can see no service of theirs to God. We can easily bring the matter to a point with such, by a simple question, "Well, what acts of service to Jesus have you performed within the last week ?"

For the service which such perform, to themselves, or their families, or their town, they have their reward : they thrive ; their families are kept in comfort, or at least from want ; they are considered useful and respectable, — verily, I say unto you, they

have their reward ; but they have not girded themselves to serve Christ, and therefore there remains no “ and ” for them, introducing a glorious “ afterward : ”
“ afterward thou shalt eat and drink.

And now, turning from such persons to those who are true servants of Christ, let us consider some few teachings which these words have for them.

It is to be observed that Christ's people are “ out-of-door servants ” and “ in-door servants ” too. Now, this must be kept steadily in view, because Satan, who is ever tempting the Lord's people, says to them, “ You cannot be always serving Christ.” To a man who is willing to serve God in his own family, he says, “ That is enough, you need have no interest out of doors ; and to the man who works out of doors, he says, “ Now, home is the place for you to relax yourself in ; it is very hard, if you must be at work always.” He knows, ah ! he knows it well, that religion is the work of life, at every time, and in every place ; that whatever we do, we must do unto the Lord ; but he hides that ; he becomes sympathetic with our poor, weak natures ; it will not answer his purpose to tell us that we must serve God at home and abroad.

Perhaps there are some of my readers who do no out-of-door work for Christ, who neither plough the ground for him, or feed his sheep. Ploughing is hard, and, to our dainty notions, soiling work ; and so we will not plough for Christ. It is hard work to lift one's foot in the heavy clay ; to set it down often, only to lift it up with greater difficulty still ; nothing springs up immediately from the ploughing ; the pros-

pect of harvest gain must be remote ; and so you plough not ; and what, if neither shall you reap ? Oh, if there were a speedy return for their toil, perhaps, some of the Lord's people who now do nothing would undertake labor on his behalf. If, in the fields around us, as men turned up the furrow, the reaper overtook the sower, and the seed threw up its sprouts beneath the ploughman's very steps, carpeting his feet with green ; if, as they sweated in ploughing, the sprouts became headed with grain, and cooled the laborer's fevered brows with the breezes which undulated the waving corn, murmuring like the melodies of another world, amid the bending stalks, as slowly, and solemnly, and keeping time to the beat of some unseen hand, they sway to and fro, — if this were the ploughman's lot, and ere the earth was reddened with the steel — man's toil on earth — it became gilded with the harvest — God's gift from heaven, — daintier hands than any which now guide the plough would be engaged in the almost poetic toil ; but such is not earthly ploughing, and such is not heavenly ploughing either ; and because it is present labor with only a future profit, and present toil, and present offence to our fastidious tastes, some of the Lord's people are leaving his out-of-door work undone. This surely ought not to be. Christ came forth from the bosom of the Father, and toiled in this outer world for us ; shall we refuse to copy the example he has so brightly set, and not go forth willingly into outer service for him ? But, it might be asked, how shall we thus go out, as it were, into the field for Christ ? The teacher in the Sabbath school

is out in the field for Christ, and so is the teacher in the night school, and so are visitors of the poor, and so are men who are confessing Jesus and living by his laws in the midst of an ungodly world, amongst whom their lot is cast. For all such there is a goodly harvest. The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few ; the fields in some cases might be said to be " white unto the harvest," but where amongst us are the willing hands, opened and outstretched to receive the flashing sickles from the Lord ? A few weak women, for the most part, are doing the hard work for God ; and so sure as God be true, so surely shall those who do the work receive from him the hire.

Let none be discouraged by the *slowness* of the out-of-door work, set before us under the image of ploughing. Much of what we have to do for God is very slow work indeed. It has nothing brilliant about it, nothing captivating to the natural man. If we try to go fast, we spoil the work. We should not on this account allow ourselves to be disgusted with it ; we should inquire, What is the nature of this particular department of labor ; am I to expect any immediate results ? If we did this, we should often go on vigorously where now we are inclined to give up weary and out of heart.

Nor let us be discouraged by the *sameness* of our day's, our week's, our year's work. We naturally crave the excitement of change ; we tire of the same thing over and over again. If we are in girded service to our Lord, he is our Master ; and it is his work we have to do. He is to appoint it to us ; and the appointment once made, we have only to go and

obey. There is a great sameness in the occupations of daily life. The most important results are merely the proceeds of this sameness steadily persevered in ; so is it in the spiritual life also. It is by "patient continuance in well doing," by ever keeping on, by adding little and little to holy influence and holy effort, that great results come out at last. This image of the ploughman suggests also to us the thought that we must be quite content to do our part, and not to meddle with other departments of labor which are not ours. There was one to plough the ground, and another to sow the seed, and, in all probability, a third to reap the harvest. We often think that unless we have a hand in everything that is going on, we are doing nothing. We say, "Why am not I in this and that enterprize? why am I not here and there?" and we might almost add "everywhere." It is a great part of spiritual wisdom to keep to our own work, and let others keep to theirs, just to see the unity of God's husbandry, and the relationship by which ploughman, sower, and reaper are all bound together. Perhaps we shall never see this any more than in theory ; but the theory is sound, and we must wait for the last great day to see how it has been worked out.

But there is yet another service to which such as are the servants of Christ are called. He who had been abroad at work in the field must also gird himself, *and serve his Master in the house.*

Now on no account, whatever, can this service be dispensed with. Satan will, no doubt, say, "Oh, it

is not needful that you should be particular at home ; you must remember that home is the place in which to relax and unbend ; and, if you have done well in the outer world, you may take your ease.

But Jesus is in the Christian's home, and he says, "Gird thyself, and serve me." And, verily, good need has a man to gird himself for the home service of his Lord ; a man must be girded to it.

He stands in girded service to Christ who refuses to fritter away, in the gratification of his tastes, accomplishments, or pleasures, the precious hours of home life. He stands in girded service to his Lord who refuses to feed habitually on expensive food or drink, in order that he may have the means of being liberal in his dealings with the cause of God. He serves with girded loins, who is ever watchful that the influences on his children be holy ; that their education be for Christ and heaven.

He serves thus, who, within the sacred privacy of his own home, for Christ's sake, represses each impatient thought, and subdues to a gentle tone what gave promise of being an angry word, and melts down, by help from heaven, the first uprisings and gatherings of a frowning storm upon the brow. Yea ; that earthly servant thus serves a heavenly Master who does all work as to a Lord higher than any upon earth, consecrating the meanest act of household service, by doing it as unto Christ. When the Christian enters into his own home, it is not to relax the girdle, but to draw it tighter still ; for the service of home will come nearer to the quick and marrow of his own individual life ; there, if anywhere, the devil will find him off his guard.

Think not, dear reader, the girdle a too constant pressure upon the loins. The priests of old were girded as they waited upon God; Jesus girded himself when he took a towel, and washed his disciples' feet; and he is girded even now. For when St. John saw him in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, he was clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. What Jesus wears in his own home in heaven, shall not we wear in these our homes on earth?

And as we have noted incidentally some of the discouraging aspects of the ploughing work out of doors, so we would now observe that the same patience and perseverance that are required to meet them are needed in in-door service also. The ploughman must be very attentive to make his furrows straight; the waiter must be very attentive to watch his master's eye. Often he has nothing else to do but stand and be ready, as occasion offers, to supply each need as it arises. This is just the position which we often have to occupy. We have to be looking attentively; to stand in a posture which says, not, "Master, see what I am doing," but, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Our Lord will surely speak; and until he does speak, it is our simple business to be watchful and attentive, and ready at his call.

But, observe, all this must be a *willing service*. "*Gird thyself*" are the words which God speaks to his people. And this opens out before us, in a moment, the great truth that it is a willing service that God requires. God will not gird us by his strong

hand until we feel the pressure of the cord upon our very vitals; and, for our very life's sake, we bestir ourselves to work. "If ye love me," said Jesus, "keep my commandments." When Peter declared before Christ, as one who knew everything, the greatness of his love, Jesus said, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep." Man must gird himself, of his own free will, — that free will sanctified by the Holy Ghost. The apostle speaks of "a work and labor of love."

And here, looking back into the ministry of years long since gone by, the author ask your permission, dear reader, to enshrine in these pages the girded service of one of the very poor.

There died, many years ago, in the small parish of St. L —, a little old man whose name was William W —. Poor old W — was bent double; he walked on two sticks, and with his sharp nose and chin almost meeting, and his shovel hat, he presented an appearance not easily forgotten.

In the little parish of St. L — there was no place of worship, and the cripple, as well as many aged people, found it impossible to reach the neighboring church of All S —. At length the preaching of the word came down to the little parish of St. L —. A curate, provided by the Pastoral Aid Society, came to preach there on Tuesday evenings, and commenced his ministry, for want of a better place, in the tap-room of a public-house! There he preached, and, blessed be God! the tap-room was full, and we wish that every tap-room could be turned to as good account. Those were happy evenings to minister and

people ; there was a warmth about them that was better than all the forms and ceremonies in the world ; even now, though many years have passed, we can recall the earnest faces and the hearty singing of working men and women and girls come from the factories just as they were,—the tap-room congregation of St. L——.

At length the tap-room ceased to be large enough, and it was determined that a building, half school-room and half chapel, should be erected in the churchyard of St. L—— ; for the little parish had a place to hold its dead, although it had none wherein, according to general ideas, a ministry could be exercised towards the living. A subscription was raised, and by degrees a beautiful little edifice began to arise under the shade of an old tree in the humble churchyard. It was hard work to get that money ! Time and space would fail us if we were to attempt to tell how the old miser with thousands held his door on the chain, and gave his refusal through the chink and died a few weeks afterwards to give an account of his talents to his God ; and how men with plenty of money were “very sorry, but they really couldn’t afford it !” That was a long, weary work ; but, blessed be God ! it was done at last, and the Lord crowned it with his blessing.

Amongst those who earnestly watched the progress of the building was our poor, crippled friend, William W——. Little had he to give ; if he had had a purse as large as his heart, he would have built the place at his own expense. But he did what he could. He did what we want you, our poor readers, to do, viz.,

what he could. The old man's heart was right ; and, " where there's a will, there's a way."

As the walls of the new building rose, the autumn came on ; and the old tree shook its leaves into the inner space, round which they chased each other as they were driven by the blast of the bitter wind. But their sports in the new building were short. The poor old man, who could not lift a hod or brick, could at least drive out these intruders ; and there, in that roofless building, was he to be seen carrying away the decaying leaves in his old shovel hat. It was a touching sight to see that aged cripple at his humble work, — humble in the sight of man, but acceptable and honorable in the sight of God ; for it was *a work and labor of love.*

The roof, however, was in due time put on, and the leafy intruders were all shut out ; so our old friend had nothing to do but to look forward to the evening of the opening of the new room.

Alas ! he was not destined to see it ; he was taken ill, and the seizure was for death. The writer of these few lines was with the old man at his dying bed ; and wonderful it was to see him sitting up, and to hear him talk of the sights he thought he saw, and the sounds he heard, — the angels of God in glorious array, and sounds of soft music as though they were harping with their harps. It may be that there was more reality in all this than we know of ; if the angels took Lazarus to his place of rest, they may also have been by that humble dying bed, charged with loving service toward him, who, even in the gathering of a few dried leaves, showed loving service to his Lord.

Surrounded by blissful sights and sounds, the old man died ; and then were produced, from his well-worn shoes, two little packets containing two pence each, his savings to lay on the plate at the opening of the new room. The money was saved from *tobacco*, and placed in the old shoes for safety.

And now the Lord, who renders every man according to his works, has doubtless repaid the old man's self-denial a million fold, and his soul is with his Saviour, and his body lies in the churchyard of St. L——, hard by his well-loved room. In the day when all things shall be brought to light, the old man's shoe pennies will be of more value than the wealth of the miser, or the honor of the noble, or the laurel wreath of the conquerer, for which millions upon millions have bartered their undying souls.

Reader, go and do likewise with thy pounds, if thou hast pounds, and with thy pence, if thou hast but pence ; and, not only with these, but with thy hands, so far as thou canst, serve the Lord. Thou mayest have to do with shrivelled leaves on earth, but the glory of the reward fadeth not away.

Such, then, in part, is girded service. Observe, in the next place, that *it is such as God himself will receive*. At the present moment God is receiving such service from his people. Jesus has now entered into his rest, but not into his perfect glory ; and, forasmuch as it was meat and drink to him while upon the earth to do his Father's will, so is it as meat and drink to him now to see that will done by the girded service of his people. "Inasmuch as ye do it unto one of the least of these, ye do it unto me."

And, is it no pleasure to us that we can indeed serve God ; that we can as truly minister to him as if he sat at table in our house ; that we can as really give to him as though we were privileged to set before him both meat and drink ?

Oh, if Jesus were to say to us, as he said to Zaccheus of old, “ Make haste ; for to-day I must dine at thy house,” what hurry would there be ! what expenditure ! what thought ! Fifty times more would that dinner cost than what we often so grudgingly draw forth for some object in which, manifestly, his interest is concerned. He who ate a piece of a broiled fish and of an honey-comb, after the Resurrection, would care nothing for this carnal honor ; but, ah ! he cares much for our responding with a willing heart when he comes for entertainment in the persons of some of his suffering ones on earth.

Did Jesus come amongst men again, and condescend to partake once more of human food, which of us would be honored to spread his table in our house ? The Holy One would not touch the dainty fare of him who gives, even though it be his gold, as a mere form. Far rather would he share the crust of the one who had but a crust, because the remainder had been lavished on his Lord.

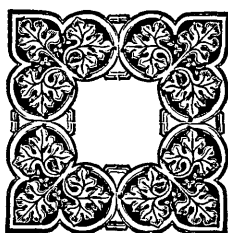
There remains, now, but one matter more. “ And afterward thou shalt eat and drink.” There is toil ; there is much toil : but there is to be enjoyment ; there is to be rest. How different would our life and service be if our Lord stopped short after a statement of how imperatively we were called upon to render

them to him! A boundless future of glory and gracious reward is opened to us by this word "and." The service of earth is not to last forever; there is an "afterward," when toil shall be known no more: "and afterward thou shalt eat and drink." Thus, it is at once our duty and privilege to serve our Lord with girded loins. Then comes it to pass of his wondrous grace that he will serve us: "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching; verily, I say unto you that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."

"Afterward," when, perhaps, a few more self-denials are practised, and a few more pains are borne. "Afterward," when yet a little more exertion has been made abroad, and some more consecrated hours of girded service have been spent at home. "Afterward," when thou hast ploughed ground which shall bear an harvest for heaven, and tended lambs which shall be carried in the bosom of Christ, and folded where the wolf can never come; and when thou hast done to him, through them, a service which he never will forget. "Afterward," an "afterward" to which there is no "afterward" again; for so shall we ever be with the Lord.

THOU shalt eat and drink. What *thou* doest is known and by grace the reward of *thy* service is secured. In all almsgiving, then, and in work of every kind for Christ, may the servant stand ministering with influence, with exertion, and with purse. The words which Jesus spake to his disciples have rolled

on through many ages to us who read these pages :
“*Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself,
and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken, and af-
terward thou shalt eat and drink !*”





VI.

But.

“ Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” — EPHESIANS iv. 28.

IF magic powers of transformation were bestowed on some benevolent reader of this book, what wonders would he not propose to himself to do !

Armed with this might, which nothing could resist, he would away to the sandy desert, whose mirage has so often mocked the thirsty traveller, and command that mirage to become a reality of gurgling streams and placid lakes. With a wave of his potent wand, each drifting sand-grain would become a juicy grass-blade, each stunted heath a shady tree. The song of the vine-dresser would be heard instead of the bittern’s cry, and the lowing of the ox instead of the wild beast’s roar.

Nor would he deal only with the waste places of the earth. Still armed with this irresistible might, he would plunge into the courts and alleys of the poor. He would say, “ Let smiling plenty take the place of

wrinkled want!" and, with a wave of his magic wand he would brighten with glowing coals a million of fireless hearths, and cause the smoke of the poor man's chimney to ascend, like clouds of incense wreathing upwards from the censer of the priest. "On those tables," he would say, "let there be bread!" and millions of little eyes would glisten, and hands would clap, and mouths would laugh, — from the sturdy boy, who revelled in the idea of a full and plenteous meal, down to the infant at the breast, who would smile because others smiled, though it knew not why. "Cover yonder shivering forms!" would our great magician cry; and thousands of aged limbs would thaw. "Cover yon unfurnished pallets!" and thousands of aged eyes would sleep. Skulls would become padded out with flesh and blood again; the parchment covering, drawn tight by poverty, under the name of skin, over the face, would become juicy with the liquids of healthful life; and, as the magician vanished from the scene of his triumph, the young would feel that life was worth the living for, and the old would almost feel that they were young again.

Nor would he stop even here. Flushed with victory, this necromancer would push his triumphs yet further into the land of the enemies of man; and entering the hospitals, where disease and pain have bound their fevered victims on their beds, he would stretch out his wand, like Moses' rod, and bid them stand up on the right hand and on the left, while the men he had come to deliver passed through, and made their escape. And what then? Then hope

would gleam and dance in leaden eyes ; then strength would quiver in the muscles of helpless limbs ; then reason would re-assert her sway in the wandering mind ; then the paroxysms of delirium would yield to the calm power of thought ; the splints of the broken limbs, the vinegar-moistened rags of the aching head, the plasters of the gashed or broken flesh, would all be cast aside ; and in a few moments, silence would reign through the empty wards.

But, in a moment, our reader, necromancer though he be, becomes arrested in his career of conquest. We present the human heart before him, and his wand shivers in his hand ; and he confesses that he is overmatched. We say to him, “ Cause that he that stole should steal no more, but rather that he should *labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth ;*” and the conqueror of barrenness, poverty, and pain, owns that he is conquered now. Yes, and let us dismiss our necromancer from the scene. Let him go, and yet leave behind him all the benefits which we suppose he has conferred ; and, in a short time the human heart, with its evil, would bring down again the curse of sin ; the wilderness with its mirage would re-appear ; the courts and alleys would be poverty-stricken once more ; the hospitals would be refilled. Sin brought thorns, and thistles, and the sweating brow in olden time ; and what it did once, it can do again.

But there is a charm more potent than that which we have just now seen fail. The believer may say, “ I am willing, in the name of Christ, and with the cross

of Christ to stand in the lists from which the powerful charmer has retired. So far from shrinking from contact with the human heart, it is with human hearts that my charm has to do." And mark! the power is not in the one that uses the charm, but in the charm itself. The most unlearned district visitor, the poorest Sunday-school teacher, the most despised tract distributor, has the charm as well as the professed preacher, — it is the gospel of Christ.

By this, the headstrong Peter is changed into a feeder of the lambs of Christ; by this, "he who persecuted the churches of Judea, in time past, now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed;" by this, the jailer of Philippi, who thrust the apostles into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks, is moved to wash those apostles' stripes, and to bring them to his own house, and to set before them meat. Yes; the gospel can do everything, from the evangelization of a world, down to the reclaiming of a thief, — yes, not only to his reformation, but to his transformation; so that he not only steals no more, but he labors, "*working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*"

It is to the consideration of the triumphs of the gospel of Christ, as manifested in the case before us, that we are now to direct our attention; and let us consider, —

I. THAT CHRIST TAKES THE WORST. II. THAT CHRIST CHANGES THE WORST. III. THAT CHRIST EXALTS THE WORST.

(I.) We can plainly see from Christ's dealings with men, during his personal ministry on earth, that he is prepared to receive even those who are reputed, and that justly, the vilest of the vile. "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them," was one of the taunts to which he was exposed; "a friend of publicans and sinners," was one of the opprobrious epithets he had to endure. "*Come unto me all ye that labor, and are heavy laden,*" was his invitation; "*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,*" was his errand.

And in thus dealing with the worst of men, our Lord acknowledges their evil. Their sins he hates; themselves he loves. In him we find none of the spurious charity of the present day, which makes out that sin is but a trifle; we meet with none of that philosophic cant which ignores so much about man's depravity, and assumes so much about his virtue. Our Lord looked the evil in the face; he practically said "the case is as bad as it can be;" and were it not for the power of his cross, in which he could deal with the worst of cases, he would never have approached it at all.

But whilst Jesus thus sees the depth of evil, he also sees that the man in whom it is, is *transformable*. No case is altogether desperate by reason of its malignity; the worst can be transformed by the mighty power of Christ. "*Be not deceived* (says St. Paul, 1 Cor. vi. 9) *neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*"

But Christ approaches this putrid mass, and, from the midst of its sweltering pollution, draws forth men who are to be arrayed in white, and to be crowned with glory, even for eternity. *Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Let us be assured that there is no safe way of dealing with the human heart but this. A dishonest closing of our eyes to the deep malignity of sin, and to the hideous pollution of the sinner, is not after the example of our Lord; and why should we be guilty of this dishonesty as regards either ourselves or others? If there were a depth of sin (apart from the sin against the Holy Ghost) which could put us out of the reach of the cross, no wonder if we tried to make ourselves out “not so bad,” lest we were in that depth, and so irrevocably lost; but when we read “*all manner of sin shall be forgiven men*” — when we are told that “*the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin,*” why hide our condition from ourselves? why try and hide it from our God? This is a wile of Satan to keep men, as broken-hearted sinners, from the cross; not such a cross as we would make, but such a cross as Christ’s really is; and his wile meets with only too much success.

“Thief” is an ugly word; but the cross, in its saving and subsequently transforming power, takes the thief as a thief, and says, “Let him that stole — ‘stole!’ — steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”

We have now seen how Christ takes the worst ; let us proceed to notice —

(II.) How he changes the worst.

Christ takes man in order to change him. For Christ to take a man, and to leave him in his original state, would be a high dishonor to God. When Christ pours his blood over a man's soul, that great work is only preliminary to the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost sent by Jesus to fit the man for heaven.

And what a number of important questions arise upon this great truth, that Christ takes a man to change him. That taking, for instance, the thief, he says to him, " Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."

Have we any reader who makes out that he has been taken by Christ, while as yet there are no signs of change in him ? Perish that man's folly ; and if it perish not from him, he is a self-deceiving and a ruined man. If Christ have anything to do with you it will be to change you, and that thoroughly ; and if you be not willing to be changed, if you think you have no need of being changed, then you are none of his.

Free grace is the doctrine of the Bible, but so is *operative* grace also ; it says that, " without holiness no man shall see the Lord ;" it declares that saved men must be changed men. There are those who, not knowing the harmonious proportions of truth themselves, bring a slanderous charge of antino-

mianism against the full preaching of free grace, but they either belie their knowledge, or do not know what free grace means.

Now observe how wonderful is this change. Take the case of this thief: "Let him that stole." Stealing was the habit of his life; and now that habit is to be changed; he is to "steal no more." The old proverb that "habit is second nature" will tell us how great is the change that is wrought here; and the true reception of the gospel requires such a change. It does not content itself with mere dealing with outward excrescences; it alters the whole constitution of man.

And what has it done, my reader, with *the very habit of your life*? We do not ask what evil thought has it suppressed; from what evil deed has it held back your hand; but what change has it made in the *habit* of your life? That is a searching question, and one that goes down beneath the surface, even to the very quick. No doubt you can produce some points in which you are improved; the very experience of life will improve most of us in some points; but the *habit* of life, in thought, and action, and feeling, can be changed only by the influence which follows the reception of the cross.

And this should be encouragement to any of my readers who find that the heart is indeed deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, and that the whole bent and bias of the natural man is away from God. You know what it is to desire to have the secret springs of your hearts wrought upon; you long to have your very nature changed; you do not

long in vain ; your desire has already entered into God's great idea in man's salvation, and fitness for glory. Christ takes the worst, — Christ takes, to change, — Christ takes, to change the very habit of the life.

And observe, he does this *in the very hardest point*. It is well known that there are few tasks harder than that of changing a thief into an industrious and honest man. Thieving makes labor hateful ; the habit of idleness, the company that it involves, the slavery of evil association, the ease with which money is gotten, the excitement of the sin, are all so many impediments in the way of hard industry and work. The light finger is not willingly exchanged for the horny hand.

And what is said here of the thief is only a general principle which is applicable to us all ; the gospel takes us to change us *in the very hardest point*. Hard points there are in every man on which this gospel has to deal. Oh, how hard have some of them been in each of us, on which it has wrought ! but it shrunk not from the task ; it attacked the besetting sin, and many a believer may take up the apostle's words, " By the grace of God I am what I am." Where no triumph has been gained, the cross has never come.

See, too, *how utter is this change* : from " stealing " to " giving ; " from *taking* away, and that dishonestly, from others, to *giving* away, and that freely, what he had won by his own hard toil. Thus the gospel wrought upon the thief, and thus it works with a thorough change upon every man on whom it comes with power ; on every man, and in every way. For

what have we in the context? Not only, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth," but something further: "that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." Not only, "Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice," but, "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Yes, this direction, that he who had stolen from others that he might live in idleness himself, should now give to others, and toil that he may have the means of giving, is but an example of a grand law of the glorious kingdom of our Lord. The old law of Moses said, "Thou shalt not steal." The new law of Jesus superadded to it, "Thou shalt work to give." Jesus never contents himself with what is negative, with the mere doing away of evil; he proceeds to what is positive, to the bringing in of good. He negatived evil when he said to the waves, "Peace be still;" he brought in positive good when he caused the ship to be immediately at land. Now the active principle of Christ's beneficence is seen in every soul in which he works. He changes the man that steals, into the man that gives; the man that curses, into the one that blesses; the man that smites, into the one that bears. He cannot stop at the casting out of evil; he must also bring in that which is good. The man out of whom he casts furious devils does not wander about harmless among the tombs; but sits at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind.

It will be for the reader to ask himself, has any such change as that which we have here brought before us passed over him? Can you say, "I am a man wholly changed by the action of the Son of God upon my heart. I am a wonder to others; I am a still greater wonder to myself. Formerly my only anxiety was how much I could get; now my anxiety is how much I can give. Formerly my desire was to resent, now it is to endure; my old impulse was to take the highest seat, now it is to sit in the lowest room. Scarce could I bring myself, in former times, to forgive the smallest slight; now I have attained to not taking offence at all; or, if I be offended, to forgiving not seven times but seventy times seven. The scowl upon my brow is changed into a smile upon my lip; my clenched fist has relaxed into an open hand; my brooding over the injuries I have received has become metamorphosed into pondering what return, in the shape of kindness, I can make."

Verily there is a deep statement of gospel power in the words which, perhaps, some honest reader thought had nothing to say to him; "Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."

Let us now, before we take leave of this subject of the reformed thief, consider some of the important practical teaching which it is calculated to convey.

Observe, —

(III.) How Christ exalts the worst and the most degraded. Some of these points of exaltation are

very plainly brought before us in the passage which we are considering now.

For, see, how full and rich are the dealings of God with reference to the man that turns from his former evil way ! Bare forgiveness is generally the most that man will accord to his fellow-man when he owns and turns from what is wrong ; but God never contents himself with simple forgiveness. Indeed, God cannot. It would be against the fulness and liberality of his nature to do so ; it would be, moreover, against the whole of the design which he has in view. If a man is to be saved, he is also to be elevated, and to be made fit for something in that kingdom of grace, in which every one contributes to the glory of his Lord. The gospel of Jesus never says to any man, “ You are just barely pardoned and nothing more ; ” “ Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.” And what follows ? why, the life of light — “ walk as children of light.” Saved men are to have more than a breathing life ; they are to have an active one. A mere breathing spiritual life it may be *at first*, according to the analogy of natural life ; but that life gradually strengthening and becoming active in every good work.

This, then, being the law of the spiritual world, we cannot be surprised at finding the thief changed, not only as regards his habits, but also his aims ; he has a new and a noble career set before him ; he is not rejected from a high position amongst the people of the Lord. For see what the apostolic precept involves. When St. Paul tells this man to steal no more, “ *but* to labor, working with his hands the thing

which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth," he, in point of fact, says to him, You are not rejected from *a position of fellowship with saints*. The saints of God are called to this work; it is a part of the family occupation; enter into the work; and into association with them in it. Yes! this association with the believing family of God is the privilege of changed men. God takes man from an old, bad fellowship; only to introduce him into a new and good one; there are new friends as well as new ways for a changed man. It is hard to lead a solitary life in the spiritual, just as it is in the natural, world; and God wills that his people should be encouraged, and stimulated, and upheld by mutual fellowship. Even if we do not come very much into contact with our friends, still it is very cheering to know we have them; we feel stronger and better for it; the very knowledge that we are not friendless gives us a heart for endurance or enterprize. But this is not all.

This man so recently sunk in the depth of vice, with his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him, working nothing but ill to his neighbor, is now called upon *to work, and that with acceptance*, for God. God will accept his work, and that, well knowing what he has so recently been. The forgiveness has been a full one; and God wishes to show it; and that the man should feel, and act in the power of it. It is as though the apostle said, You need not be a poor timid creature, skulking in a corner, frightened at everybody and everything; your God and your King has forgiven you. He has introduced

you into his family ; go and act as his child should act ; be assured of his acceptance and love.

Sometimes people are met with, who say they do not feel themselves worthy to do anything for God ; they do not think God can accept their services ; they can only hope at the best, that he will tolerate them. We may rest assured, that when any work that we set about is of God's own appointing, we shall receive acceptance in our honest attempt to perform it. Our worthiness is of Christ, and not of ourselves ; our service is accepted for his sake, not for our own. If we wait to work for God until we are worthy of being employed by him, we may wait for ever ; in our position of workmen, as in that of children, our standing is in Christ.

We see also, that this thief is not rejected from *a position of honor*. He is to be a messenger of God ; an almoner of the Great King ; a distributor of his bounty. Rightly understanding that a portion, and that no niggard one, of what he has is the Lord's, he feels himself intrusted with it, to lay it out for him. Formerly the chief thought was that all he could get was his own, and his conscience would have forbidden his supposing that he could dedicate any part of it to God ; now that he is changed, he sees that he is not his own, for he is bought with a price ; nor are his goods and gains absolutely his own, for they belong to the One that redeemed him ; and so he becomes a distributor for God out of what he has earned himself. Now this is a position of honor ; and would that every one saw how great that honor is. It is because God is not before men's eyes in giving, that

they are often so unwilling to give, or so niggardly in their gifts. "I am a messenger from God," the changed thief might have said. "This is the gift of God," he might have added, as he gave to him that needed a part of his hard-earned gains.

And may we not see some honor for the giver, in the fact that others are put under a holy obligation to him. The receiver is undoubtedly under holy obligation to the giver, even though he may be far his superior in spiritual attainments and position. The family of God are linked together by a great variety of bands, and this is undoubtedly one of them. Cups of cold water given to disciples of Jesus are not forgotten, but shall receive their reward; believers must not think lightly, either as receivers or givers, of what their Master values so much, and will reward so richly.

And now let us learn from all this, not to reject from Christian fellowship any changed and converted man, on the score of what he had once been. St. Paul, the great builder up of the Church, had once been its bitterest persecutor. The Corinthian, who had been guilty of gross sin, was, on his repentance, to be received and comforted. If God is willing to blot out the past, who are we that we should insist on retaining it. Let us be alive to the wonders of grace in the restoration and change of poor fallen sinners, and not, so far as in us lies, put the brand of eternal reprobation upon any man's brow. Where God forgives, we may well do the like, and act by the changed man in our little sphere of time, as he does in the vaster sphere of eternity. Nor let us reject a

changed man because of what he might be again. With that, until it happens, we have nothing to do. If we are to be swayed by our suspicions, we can never extend the right hand of Christian fellowship to any man in the beginning of his changed life ; * if we say, " What has been may be, and therefore I will stand aloof," what poor prodigal will ever find a friend ?

We, perhaps, are inclined in this verse only to look at the liberality enjoined on the changed thief ; but let us look deeper than this, even at the liberality manifested by God in accepting the services of such an one ; the liberality of Christ in receiving that service as done to himself. Honest labor becomes consecrated when it works, not only to provide food for the hungry mouth, but also charity for the liberal hand.

Another lesson also we learn here, which is, *not to be afraid of setting before men the highest motives.* It might have been thought that it would have been enough to have said to this reformed thief, " How much safer it is for you to earn honest bread, than to lead a life of crime ! How could you ever feel safe while you did not know but that at that very moment the officers of justice were on your track ? Moreover, consider what an uncertain provision you had ; you never knew from one day to another where you could procure your daily bread. Think, also, how you must have been looked down upon ; how you could have no society but that of your criminal companions ; and give up this bad, thieving life, and for your own

* Appendix C.

sake become an honest man." All this is very true ; and all these motives deserve to have their proper weight ; godliness has in these respects the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come ; but we find something in advance of this ; something above self-interest ; he is to get, not only to have, but to give ; he is to be swayed by a law of Christian love higher than the law of self, which is the highest law that the carnal heart recognizes and obeys.

Surely, this is not only very wonderful, but also very suggestive. Does it not distinctly teach us the wisdom and the value of making use of a high standard ? Does it not say to us, " Do not be afraid to try and lift man out of himself ; there are forces in the spiritual kingdom which are more potent than those of the natural kingdom ; there is in man a power of responding to their influence ; use them, and look to God for success " ?

We may be persuaded that the higher the motive power we use, the less danger will there be of a relapse. The reformed thief who learns to make the wants of others his care is not likely to think so little of the interests of others as to rob them of their goods. In our dealings with sinners, when we try to reclaim them from any evil way, let us not content ourselves merely with arguments based on self-interest. They are no doubt powerful ; but more powerful still are those which will lead them farther from their old evil ways, inducing them not merely to desist from the old course, but actually to start upon a diametrically opposite road. All is decided in what

the apostle says ; there must be no mingling of light with darkness ; the stealing must be stopped ; the labor must be gone through ; and then the honor and pleasure of benevolence can be attained.

There remains nothing now but that we add a word of encouragement to such as have led a useless, or worse than useless, life, and wish to amend. Let the time past suffice for such folly. You have been foolish and sinful in this aspect ; but be so no more. God on his part is willing, through Christ, to blot out your past, and to open a new career before you for the future. Cut off at once all the old sins, the old companionships, the old habits, and enter on the career of labor, and, through it, on that of benevolence and service for God, according to the opportunities which he in his providence sets before you.

It may be that the history of your past is very bad ; but it does not exclude you from the opportunity of a blessed future. Do not say, " It is no good for me to try and amend ; old habits are rooted ; old associates are too strong ; I should be looked on with suspicion by God's people if I tried to join myself to them." All this can be overridden by the mighty power of God. The field of usefulness is vast and varied ; in some portion of it you can find a work to do. If God send you, no man can hinder you ; begin anew, begin at once, and may God's blessing be with you in your work.

Jesus, where his gospel is received in its power, raises a man above "*SELF thought*." The thief thought only of himself ; but, now that he is evangelized, " to get for self " ceases to be the main idea of life.

Jesus teaches a man to do good at "SELF COST." What the thief gave he had to work for; it cost him something to be charitable.

The gospel teaches a man to do good, *not spasmodically, but at the cost of* "CONTINUED LABOR;" "let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good."

Let us behold, then, in the reformed thief, the principles at work, which must also work in every one of us. If we receive the gospel only with the ear, we may remain in our sins; but if we receive it with the heart, we must become altogether changed.

Let us question ourselves as to whether we be changed, and wherein that change has taken place. If we be unchanged, we are unsaved.

Let us remember that if Christ takes the worst, he also changes and exalts him, as we see in the precepts to the thief: "Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."





VII.

Rut.

“And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her.” — RUTH i. 14.



ADVERSITY is the test of love. It is war that tries the courage of the soldier, the hill that tries the mettle of the racer, the tempest that proves the timbers of the ship. It is adversity that tests the sincerity and the enthusiasm of love. As gilding is not gold, so profession is not love. As the one will not stand the effects of the atmosphere, or of use, so the other will not survive the rough handling of the untoward circumstances of life. The least enduring of all counterfeits is that of love; and he is the basest of all forgers who coins this cheat and lie. All, however, that resembles love is not hypocrisy. There is such a thing as affection which is real of its kind; which will go so far, but no farther; which seems to partake of the nature of love, but does not come up to it in its dignity or power. And such might have been possessed by Orpah the daughter-in-law of Naomi, who wept with her, and kissed

her, but went back to her own people and her gods.

There is great and important teaching for us in the words which we have just now read. "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her."

There are few more touching portions of Scripture than this whole story of Naomi and Ruth, which, apart from its intrinsic beauty, interests the servants of God by the fact that Ruth, although a Moabitess, was one of the earthly ancestors of Jesus Christ. Driven by famine from the land of Israel, Elimelech and his wife, with their two sons, came into the territory of Moab to find bread. There they lived; and Mahlon and Chilion, the two young men, married Orpah and Ruth, who were daughters of the land. But soon death came, and passing his icy hands over Elimelech and Chilion and Mahlon, stole them away from life, leaving in that little family three desolate widows, where, but a little while before, there had been three happy wives. Plenty had returned to the land of Naomi. She heard how God had visited his people in giving them bread,—bread of which her Elimelech and Chilion and Mahlon should never taste; and thither will she return, for what had she, the desolate woman, to do in a stranger's land? And as she was about to depart, she, the widowed mother, blessed the widows of her two departed children, and prayed God also to bless them for their former kindness to the dead, wishing that each might find rest in the home of her husband; that they might not ever live desolate, but meet with love and honor and support. None are so dear to us as those who once

showed kindness to our dead ; we feel bound to them with a tie which savors of the spirit-world. And Naomi remembered the kindness which Orpah and Ruth had shown to her dead Mahlon and Chilion ; and her dried-up heart, touched by the remembrance, became a fount of blessing which welled forth its waters upon them both. And now comes the trying moment, when Naomi, the mother of the dead, and Orpah and Ruth, the wives of the dead, must part, unless, indeed, the love which bound them together should prove too strong to break. Before the Moabitish women lies an unknown land, with no protection and no friend. Behind them lie their own familiar homes, their family, and friends ; and with, we can well imagine, a tearful eye and heaving breast, Orpah prints upon Naomi's withered lips the last, long, passionate kiss and token of a sad farewell, and they part ; they part, and we hear of Orpah again no more. But nothing short of death shall sever Naomi and Ruth ; and the remembrance of her name is never allowed to die, for it becomes enshrined in the genealogy of our Lord.

Let us direct our attention —

1. To the character of which Orpah was a type. She is a specimen of one that is bound *only by an outward tie*. She was Naomi's daughter-in-law ; and this relationship seemed to have carried her very far, but yet not far enough. She kissed ! She wept ! She turned back ! And are there not very many who are bound to religion by an outward tie, and nothing more ? It is professed by some they love. It is perhaps the teachings of their early youth : they have

come into relationship with it, and the fact of their having professed to a certain extent binds them to it. But if there be no stronger bond than this, when the moment for decision comes, the power of the outward tie will not be strong enough, the man will fail. None of us must deceive ourselves for a moment by the thought that we can be carried through any dangerous pass of spiritual experience, or through the trying hour of our last extremity, by the bond of any outward ties to religion and to Christ: we cannot be. There must be a union of soul, a secret sympathy, a true devotion, such as existed between Ruth and Naomi, to bear one safely through. Think of this, dear reader. If you be not bound to Christ by aught stronger than an outward tie, all your regularity in attending ordinances, all your real esteem for Christ, may prove to be only a betrayal of him with a kiss. It will never enable you to do all that must be done. Oh, pray that the Spirit may join you to your Lord by the strong cord of inward love! Ruth looked not at the mere fact that she had been the wife of Naomi's son, but she clung to Naomi herself; and we must dwell, not upon the fact that we belong to Christ's Church, but to Christ himself. This will make us proof against the seductions by which others are carried away; and when they bestow upon him but an empty kiss, we shall hold him fast with a firm and a loving grasp.

Orpah is, further, a type of such *as are not proof against discouraging aspects*. There lay before this Moabitish woman a strange land and people, and in all probability poverty and toil; and she shrank from

undertaking so perilous a step as venturing on this unknown ground. And nothing but the discouraging aspects of religion are preventing some well affected men from joining heart and hand with Christ. Were some anticipated evil removed, some dangers taken away, some unpleasantnesses softened down, they would start boldly forward for the distant land and relinquish all for Christ. Affection strongly inclines them to do this ; fleshy sloth and fleshy fears are only too successful in keeping them back. All goes on well until tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, and then the discouragement tells ; the one that offered to join himself to Christ holds back. Let us be assured that this condition is one of exceeding peril. There are often recurring seasons in the spiritual life when things wear an aspect that is discouraging in the extreme ; even spiritual things look very dark, and a considerable measure of present ease can be obtained by staying still ; the advantage of the onward move lies hidden, as it did to Ruth ; the difficulty, only, is apparent, as it was to Orpah ; and, Orpah-like, men shrink ; and, wishing well to Christ, they turn from him and are lost. The record we have given us of the children of Israel, that " their soul was discouraged because of the way," is the very record that now describes the circumstances under which so many are destroyed ; they did run well, but they were hindered ; and in that hindrance they found death.

But why are not these discouraging aspects removed, seeing that they do such hurt to immortal and to priceless souls ? It is necessary, alike for

God's glory and the perfecting of our moral character, that they should not. It is God's intention, rather to give his people strength to overcome their obstacles, than to remove those obstacles himself; and under these circumstances we may expect them always to exist. Woe, then, be to the man that makes any impediment an excuse for his not going forth with Christ! Woe be to him! He may, indeed stay in Moab for a while, and be at ease; but that is the utmost he shall have. No enduring name shall be his; no future portion of honor and of wealth shall fall to his happy lot. He who deems not heaven to be worth a struggle; he who, to reach its blissful shores, would not make a sacrifice; he who would not take up a cross and follow Christ, yea, and journey with him whithersoever he goeth, to receive a future crown, is not worthy of the portion of the redeemed. Should any read these lines who, Orpah-like, will go to a certain extent, and be well affected even to the very last; who part from Jesus with a kiss; who half mourn that they cannot go any farther; who speak kindly and affectionately of Jesus, even with the final breath, — know that all this is not love; all this is not devotion; all this is not the homage of the heart's most sacred powers. Deceive ye not yourselves by the soothing thought that because ye ever think well of Christ; yea, speak well of him; yea, give him love's outward token of a kiss, ye must needs be his. Not so; weary travel generally precedes the unending rest; temporary trials must be borne before the country where there is no trial can be reached; the spirit, not of Orpah, but of Ruth, is

needed, — “Orpah *kissed* her mother-in-law, but Ruth *clave* unto her.”

Turn we now to Ruth, whose name is immortalized in the genealogies of Christ, as being one drawn forth from a heathen land, and knit into the body of the Israel of God ; one who teaches us of the sovereignty of grace, even in those days when the Church was exclusive to the very last degree. No entreaties had any force to shake her resolution ; no prospects of future hardship were able to wrench asunder the ties which bound her to the one she loved so well. Her words are at once the soft tones of entreaty and the strong assertions of decision, — the entreaty and decision of love. “Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee ; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God : where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”

And as Orpah has come before us the type of *affection* and *not love*, so Ruth appears in glowing colors as *the type of love itself*. She exhibits, first of all, *the tenacity* of one who truly loves. Now tenacity is a decided and invariable characteristic of true and earnest love. One only severer of its ties will it acknowledge, and that one is death ; yea, shall we say that it acknowledges even death, for do we not fold our arms around the memories of the dead, and cling to them with a most tenacious grasp ? That love is not worthy of the holy name, which will not bear

buffetings and storm, revilings and hard blows, losses, anguish, toil, for the one on whom the love is set. To come short of this is not to love at all. We need seek no analogy in nature to picture to our minds the tenacity of love; for nature, after having exhausted all her stores, confesses that she has nothing wherewith truly to set it forth. And this tenacity must never be lost sight of when we contemplate and describe the Christian's love to God; when the love is real it will never fail to exhibit this decided mark. Such love was often shown by the martyred saints of olden times. St. Peter, who could challenge even the omniscience of Jesus' Godhead as to the sincerity of his love, proved that that love was enduring by his faithfulness even unto death. In the early days of sword and flame, in later days of massacre and blood, though the fingers of the martyrs relaxed as their heads rolled upon the scaffold, or became shrivelled and calcined as they sunk down amid the flames, into which they were cast like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of old, still their loving hold of Christ was never, never loosed; and they left a dying testimony that they loved him even amid the fires. And is it only in such scenes as these that we are to find examples of the tenacity of the saint's love to Christ? —far from it. Men who have never been martyrs, have never been confessors, have loved Christ with a grasp which no earthly power could sever. They would listen to no arguments of the world, or the flesh, or the devil, to give him up; they would not believe, in the trial of long afflictions, that he had forgotten them, or ceased to love them; and they would

not cease to yield him in turn their heart's fullest love ; they clung to him as their all ; they kept close to him as the centre around which alone they could revolve ! No doubt the Saviour has often allowed such love as this to be sorely tried ; no doubt he has permitted the waves to sweep over it, and the whirlwinds to lash it, and the storm to howl and roar around it, — temptations, and sorrows, and losses, and depressions have come with his full knowledge upon the man that professed it ; but such love was faithful to him through them all. This was the love which the bride describes in the book of Canticles, when she tells us that “ many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it ; if a man would, give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned.” And such tenacity is the characteristic of the love of every child of God. Oh, that we realized it more and more within our souls ! Then we should not be tossed to and fro as we are now ; then, our minds being made up under all circumstances to cling to Christ, we should not lose time in halting between two opinions, when love shows us which way Christ would have us go. The world might bruise us with all its weight, strike us with all its force, and shake us with the powerful grasp of its fearful rage, but it could never induce us to relax our hold of Christ. We should cry out, victorious, even when we were almost dead, “ Christ's I am ; Christ's I will be ; Christ's in weal or woe, in pleasure or in grief, in life, in death, in time, and in eternity, for this world and for the world that is to come ! ”

Thus Ruth, as a type of character, brings before us the tenacity of such as truly love ; she shows us, moreover, that that love continues *even after some original ties are broken*. No doubt she first loved Naomi because she was the mother of her now dead husband, but she must have done so for her own sake as well, else, like Orpah, she would have merely kissed her, and turned back. And true individual love, when once it has grasped its object, will survive even though that which originated it has faded out of sight. The feeling that our sins have been forgiven us for Christ's sake may have been the first cause of our love to him ; but long after we have loved him as a Saviour, we shall love him for himself, as being in his glory and his beauty worthy of that love. There are intrinsic excellencies in Jesus for which he is to be loved ; and he who knows him as he is, passing even beyond redemption, acknowledges that in intrinsic excellence and beauty there is no one like him.

And Ruth loved *when prospects were gloomy in the extreme*. There was no immediate likelihood of her receiving any benefit from her pilgrimage with Naomi. Weary travel, a strange people, and hard toil were all that to the eye of sense were about to be her lot ; but of these she made no account. Naomi was going ; and, no matter what was to be encountered, her resolution was fixed. "Where thou goest I will go." And prospects are oftentimes gloomy enough for the children of God ; gloomy in the things of the world, and gloomy in those of the soul ; there is often a long journey of weary travel from Moab to Israel, from the starting point to the end of the Christian

life ; but love is not daunted by any prospect of peril or of pain ; it is love's high prerogative to energize the soul, and raise it above all these. And come what will to us, whether it be spiritual conflicts or worldly loss, if we love Christ, the only question that we are to ask is this, "Am I journeying on with him ?" One thought filled the mind of Ruth, it was that she was with Naomi ; let one thought fill ours, the thought that we are with our Lord. Ruth was happy at the mere thought of being with Naomi, even though she was an aged and a helpless woman, who could make for her no provision, and avert from her no peril. We, too often, with a doubtful love, can scarce be brought to undertake anything with Jesus, even though he be so rich that there is no provision which he cannot supply ; so strong, that there is no peril which he cannot avert. One point there is which we would notice before we conclude. Ruth declares that she will take Naomi's God for hers ; and this, and not her love for her mother-in-law, drew her into the ancestral line of Christ. We can scarce imagine that this Moabitish woman's husband left her ignorant of the history and the hopes of his nation, as being the Lord's ; and she was actuated not merely by the wish to be the companion of Naomi, but also by that of being servant to her God.

And now does not this whole story of Orpah, and Naomi, and Ruth come home to ourselves ? Let any of my readers who kiss our Lord, yet turn back, who are bound to him by the ties of an outward profession and not by the mysterious bonds of love, bethink them now in time, that the greatest amount of pro-

fession is not enough. With a kiss upon his lips the traitor betrayed his Lord; with a kiss Orpah took leave of Naomi, and turned away; and with kisses upon your lips it is highly possible for you to be lost.

And you, my dear readers, who, by grace from heaven, have chosen Jesus as your own, who choose his company in travel above that of all others in ease, cleave to him with full purpose of heart; for he will bring you safely to Canaan at last. As the falling away of Orpah was a temptation to Ruth, so the holding back of others, and those perhaps both near and dear to you, may be a trial to each of you; but "he that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved."

And if ye cling to Christ, there exists no power which can sever you from him, either in this world or in that which is to come. The loving Ruth, remembering how death had severed her from the husband to whom she had given her young heart, could but say to Naomi, "The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part me and thee;" but the loving Christian, remembering how Jesus has conquered death, can say far more, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"



VIII.

Fre.

"The nobleman saith unto Him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth."—
JOHN IV. 49, 50.

CN many a sad and melancholy errand did men come to Jesus; but amongst them all, never came there one in more pitiable case than the nobleman in the text. Sorrow and anguish were in his heart; disease and death were invading his home; the resources of human help had failed; the expectations of human hope had fled. He who alone could truly read the heart, and sympathize with it in every form of its woe, now probed the very depths of this suppliant's soul. In him he saw, not the nobleman, but the parent; not the man who possessed much, but the one who was about to lose much; not the man who dwelt in a lordly house, but the one who had in his house a stricken and a dying child. Happy was the noble of Capernaum: he found the truest source both of sympathy and help; and happy are all they who, like him, stand before Jesus in their sorrow and their need; for it pleased the fa-

ther that in him should all fulness dwell, — the sympathy of a man and the omnipotence of God.

Not long was the suppliant kept without the blessing he required. For a moment Jesus spake of the want of faith which was apparent, even in the one who had faith enough to believe that he could work the cure; but he quickly applied himself to the necessities of the case, and spake the words which were necessary for the recovery of the child. The nobleman who in the weakness of his faith thinks that every moment's delay is the loss of one of the few chances of life which remain is urgent with the Lord. "Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth."

Let us inquire more closely into the circumstances of the narrative before us, for they have deep teachings for our too faithless souls. The points which come prominently before us are, —

I. THE MEASURE OF THE NOBLEMAN'S FAITH. II. HIS TREATMENT BY CHRIST. III. THE RESULTS OF HIS INTERVIEW WITH HIM.

With regard to the nobleman's faith, we must observe, in the first instance, that it was real. Had he not been under the influence of a real faith, he would never have sought the Lord, as the only one that could heal his child. Dark and ignorant he doubtless was about the character of Jesus, and the still higher powers of spiritual restoration which he possessed; but, so far as it went, he had a real faith, and under its influence he travelled from Capernaum to Cana, and stood in the presence of Christ. But, though real, it was both imperfect and weak. It is

quite evident that the nobleman was not a disciple of Jesus as the Saviour of the world; that he could heal he knew full well, but not that he could heal the soul; and it is not till afterwards we have the testimony that "himself believed and his whole house." And not only was there this serious imperfection in his belief, but there was great weakness even in what he had; there was shortcoming in the quality as well as the quantity of his faith; the haste, the urgency which we find here are to be looked for in the nobleman, if we contemplate him only as *a parent*, but not if we look at him as *a believer* of any strength. If we look at the centurion who was placed in somewhat similar circumstances, we find how calm and settled strong faith can be; he asks Jesus but to speak a word, while the nobleman would have him actually come. The one can talk with Christ, while the matter of life and death is as yet unsettled; the other is all agitation and distress, "Come down ere my child die." Whether we compare the faith of the nobleman with that of the centurion, or even the Samaritan's in the earlier portion of the chapter, we rejoice that his son was spared; we rejoice that afterwards himself and his whole house believed; but we must own that it was not so much through the strength of his faith, as through the abundance of Christ's mercy, that the blessing was vouchsafed.

And here, if we be wise, we shall direct our attention to our own cases, and search out the nature and characteristics of our faith. Of what kind is it? how far does it go, how has it acted in those emergencies in which it has been specially tried? Is it real at all?

or is it only a name, a theory, a confession, a something in which we have been brought up as a necessary part of our educational course? This is the first point to settle; and when we have ascertained this, we should proceed yet further, and try whether we believe enough, and whether our faith acts becomingly in the hour of need. Evils of the most complicated kind result from a want of comprehensiveness in our faith; we see Jesus in one aspect, but not in another; we are ready to acknowledge him as a Saviour in some one specific point, but not in all; we trust him when we can connect him with visible means, or when he is very near at hand, but not when we have nothing to lean on but his character, his very self. Under circumstances such as these, men's conscious necessity proves stronger than their imperfect faith; and they would hurry Christ's action on their behalf. May God enable us to pass beyond this nobleman in our faith. We must try and grasp Jesus in his fulness, and believe him equal to our need; we must see that in every particular in which it is possible for us to want, he has within himself the fulness of the supply; we must learn, not only to trust his character, but also to wait upon it, leaving always the precise moment of his interference to himself.

And whence has our impatience or our fretfulness arisen, but from want of faith? "He that believeth shall not make haste;" but we from time to time have been importunate, not so much from a spirit of prayer as from one of anxiety; we would often have Jesus manifest himself in ways which did not suit the

intentions of God ; the little leak in our faith let in whole waves of woe. Nor let it be supposed that in thus advocating the great importance of steady faith, calm trust in Jesus under circumstances of every kind, we are annihilating the feelings and quenching the affections of men. We must not be supposed to argue for stolid indifference, or pernicious fatalism, or any such thing ; faith does not partake of either of these in its character ; it does not want help from either of them in its actions. If we be men of faith, we must derive all our comfort from the thought that we and ours are in the hands of God, and that all have been committed to him ; and that henceforth it only remains for us to wait with expectance, humility, and confidence, to know what is his will, to see what he will do.

We need scarcely point out the advantage of having even so much faith as the nobleman in the text, the disadvantage of not having more ; we need scarcely say that what has been written applies to everything connected both with the body and the soul ; in all may we have grace largely and comprehensively to trust our Lord. Oh, let us not call down upon ourselves the rebuke which we find our Lord administering here : “ Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.” Once having preferred our requests, from that moment out, let it be our part to keep our eyes steadfastly on Christ ; and, blessed be God ! though our flesh be weak, we shall feel that it has fastened upon the ONE that is strong : “ the bruised reed will he not break, and the smoking flax will he not quench.”

Thus much, then, are we taught by the measure of this nobleman's faith; let us examine —

II. His treatment by Christ.

His unbelief, and, no doubt, not his only, but that also of others who stood around, was rebuked. He to whom the nobleman had come was the Searcher of hearts, and he saw how much was wanting in the suppliant's faith. Nor need we be surprised that our Lord should have taken this opportunity of warning those who were around of their spiritual state. The very fulness of his mercy made it necessary for him to do this. Jesus saw deeper into the nobleman's necessities than he could see himself. His eye was fixed upon a disease far more dangerous to the soul of the nobleman than any bodily one could be to the life of his child. It was not a want of sympathy that made Him now speak of spiritual things; no! it was the deepest sympathy of all. The nobleman would have Jesus interest himself in behalf of one dying child, and he does not only this but infinitely more. He interests himself in the case of every one around. Perhaps as Jesus spake his words of solemn warning, there were some who thought that they were ill-timed and misplaced. Was this a fitting season for spiritual admonition? Was not this answer a tampering with the holiest affections of our nature? a touching with a cruel and a wanton hand the exposed and quivering nerves of a bleeding heart? Thus might men have thought; but if Jesus did wound, it was but to heal. We may rest assured from what we know of his character, and of the agonies which he himself so freely endured for us, that it was not only necessary that the measure

of unbelief in the nobleman and those around should be rebuked, but also that it should be rebuked at this specific time.

And let us not be surprised if there are seasons when the first answer to our petition is a bringing into light and judgment our secret sin ; when, after having come as we think in faith, our very first experience of God's dealings with us is a discovery of a want of faith. We must not expect that Christ will deal with us simply according to our own sense of want, but rather according to his. To have healed the nobleman's child would have doubtless been a wondrous mercy ; but to have done, not only that, but wrought belief on all his house was how much more ! Let men attentively examine the conduct of Jesus here, and they will find it full of instruction for their souls. They will learn not to think those ministers of God intrusive, unfeeling, and ill-timed who, in the hours of domestic bereavement, or threatened calamity, press upon them the necessity of coming more closely into communion with God, of learning more about themselves. Human sympathy may be sweet, but faithful teaching is more precious far. Should not the ministers of Christ do as did Christ himself ? They will learn also that the heavy pressure of personal affliction is not allowed to excuse a man from deep spiritual discipline. Both are at times energetically carried on together, but under no circumstances can any amount of mental or bodily suffering stand as a substitute for that work which must be pre-eminently carried on upon the soul.

But whilst our Lord lays bare this formidable

amount of unbelief, he does not deny the request of the nobleman on behalf of his dying child. Never did Jesus refuse to heal, even in one single case ; and now, when he saw before him the sorrowing father, and by the power of his godhead contemplated also the sad condition of his dying son, he was not likely to stay his loving and his powerful hand.

And ever let us remember that delay is not denial ; the staying of Christ's hand is not the refusal of his lips. Even when he is about to give most largely, he seems to tarry most by the way. It is to a weak faith that delays are so perplexing, so disturbing, and oftentimes productive of irritation and of sin. Never will Jesus deny us anything that is for our good ; but the time we must always leave with him.

But *how does Christ grant the petition?* for there is oftentimes as much love in the method of bestowal as in the gift itself. The petition is granted in the spirit of it, but not in the letter. The nobleman would have had Jesus *come down*, and heal his son. Jesus does not go, but sends the suppliant home with a simple assurance that his prayer was granted : "Go thy way ; thy son liveth." Easy, no doubt, it would have been for our Lord to have gone at once with the nobleman to his home. He might have preached as he went along, and at his leisure admonished this noble, and such as were around him, of their unbelief ; but the soul is to be dealt with in another way, and he must learn that even the word of Christ is abundantly enough. There was no such dealing as this necessary with regard to the centu-

rian, who had faith enough to believe that Jesus could heal even by a word ; therefore, Christ himself proposed to go down to the house. But here there was more to be learned, and our Lord will not for any considerations of present comfort allow it to be passed by.

And let not any of us expect, if we be God's children, to escape that exercise which is so necessary for our soul's health. Even in the very way in which our petitions are granted, we shall be under teaching ; and in many and many an instance we shall find ourselves led by a way that we know not, and dealt with after a manner of which we had no thought. It is oftentimes while things are in suspense that we are taught the reality of faith ; and oftentimes while we are waiting to see the fulfilment of a promise that we gain the highest trust in the Promiser himself.

Let us turn, however, to —

III. The ultimate results of this nobleman's interview with Christ.

In the first place, his request was granted ; in the next, his faith was increased ; and, lastly, there was effected the conversion of himself and of his whole house. In what form our Lord granted the request, we have already seen. And what father could complain of the method of the cure, seeing that the cure itself was wrought ? And, after all, was not Christ liberal even over and above what the nobleman would have had him be ? He, in the weakness of his belief, expected no cure until some hours had elapsed, until Jesus had travelled from Cana to Ca-

pernaum ; but even after the delay occupied by our Lord's rebuke, the cure was more quickly wrought than if it had been accomplished in the way the nobleman desired. Jesus said upon the spot, and at the very time, "Go thy way ; thy son liveth : " and at that very moment the fever left him ; for we are told afterwards that "*the father knew that it was at the same hour in the which Jesus said to him, Thy son liveth.*"

And thus in the experience of God's people has it been ever found. Christ's way is the shortest after all ; no time is lost by letting him work exactly how he will. In our shortsightedness, we cry out if he do not take our path ; but his own is nearer than any one we know. Never, never let us consider that time lost in which Jesus is showing us those spiritual things which we need to know, he at the same time holding in abeyance the immediate promise of what we want. When the proper time has come, he will not only work, but work effectually ; and the faith which has trusted him shall never be put to shame.

The healing of the nobleman's child was one, then, of the ultimate results of his interview with Christ. It is evident from the story itself that even such faith as he had was greatly increased when Jesus said unto him, "Go thy way ; thy son liveth," connecting the miraculous cure with no other sign, or touch, or word. We do not find him begging any longer that the Lord would "come down," but simply going his way according as he had been desired ; "and the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him, and

he went his way." And every trial, every delay, is intended to produce this result, if only we will allow it to work as God designs. This man's belief in Christ as the one able to heal his child comes out stronger after the Lord had dealt with him, not exactly as he first desired, but as his case required. Why, he who was so ready and so urgent with his cry for Christ to come at once, who could not brook one moment's delay, now goes away satisfied with such simple words, we cannot divine, unless it be that Jesus had been working faith in him; had been giving him that belief which is the preliminary to the receiving great and wondrous things. That Christ did this we have no doubt; and although, as we can see by what follows, much weakness remained, still the nobleman was fitted for being a recipient of the blessing he desired.

What blindness cleaves to us to the very end, we can see from what followed, when he met his servants on the way. All that he could ask was, "when the child began to *amend*; but he had to learn that the moment Christ had spoken, the disease had been *expelled*: "Yesterday, at the seventh hour, the fever left him." Again he received another lesson which seems to have led him on to recognize Jesus in that belief which is to eternal life: "himself believed, and his whole house." Believed what? — that Jesus was a worker of miracles? Not so, for the nobleman knew that before, else he would not have gone to him to heal his child. That the child was restored to health? — not so, for that was a matter of fact which could not be denied. What then? what else

save that Jesus was what he professed to be, the Messiah that was to come? Here, then, Jesus, by preserving the life of a child, wrought within that child's parents faith which was to life eternal; but very diverse are the ways of God; for, by taking away the life of a child, has Jesus oftentimes since converted the parents' souls, and made them believe, and become partakers of that life which has no end.

Oh, may we be ever led from lower up to higher attainments in faith! may each step on which we stand help us to one above! Thus let it be with us; then calm and peaceful in spirit we shall sweetly wait on Jesus; enough will it be for us that we have spoken of our case to him; far better will he order for us than we by any possibility could have ordered for ourselves.





IX.

Whence.

“And His disciples answered Him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread, here in the wilderness?” — MARK viii. 4.

THE want of bread has often been the touchstone of a profession of faith. Hand-to-hand encounters has faith often had with deepest poverty, the chronicles of which are all stored in the archives of the skies. In lonely and almost murderous conflict does this faith battle with its antagonist in places of which we little know; no prospect of fame has it, if it should succeed; none of renown, even though its victory should be most complete; its only reward on earth is the deep-seated consciousness of suffering patiently like Christ; its true reward is in the heaven, where the rest remaineth for the people of God.

And here, it is the want of bread that tests the faith of the disciples; that faith is tried, and in trial fails. Some measure of faith no doubt existed, but it was very imperfect; the natural eye beheld the deep ne-

cessity of the multitude, but the spiritual eye did not perceive the deep supplies which were in Christ. All this is full of teaching for our souls; for where they failed, many fail; and the lesson which Jesus gave to the disciples, he also gives to us.

The first point which strikes us here is *the need of the multitude*. "Great multitudes came to Jesus, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others." (Matt. xv. 30.) St. Mark describes the multitude as "being very great, and having nothing to eat;" a graphic picture in very few and simple words. The people were many, the place was a wilderness, the want was urgent; it may be that life itself hung upon its being supplied. We can hardly fail to see at a glance how universal, how pressing, was the need.

Had Jesus been simple man, — man, in the selfishness, or the impotence of human nature, — we should probably have had a doleful record of this great multitude that had nothing to eat. Their story would have been that of strong men fainting in the desert; of women and children stricken, it may be, even unto death; the record would have been one of anguish and distress; but, the Multiplier of wine at the marriage feast was ready to prove himself the multiplier of bread in the desert; there must be no real lack, when he is there to give.

After a very brief statement, then, of the critical statement of affairs, and showing us the starving multitude, as it were, at a glance, the evangelist presents Jesus before us, first, in his compassion, and then, in his power, interposing, however, between

the two, the failure of the disciples, which is brought before us in the word "Whence."

"I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their own homes, they will faint by the way, for divers of them came from far."

We must certainly, to our great comfort, dwell for a while on this compassion of the Saviour, before we consider our main subject, — HUMAN LIMITATIONS TO DIVINE POWER, as brought out by this word "Whence."

"I have compassion," said Jesus. Let us not profess to enter into the depth of those three words; they cannot be fathomed by any human mind. God only knows the full meaning of Jesus' words, "I have compassion." But though we do not know all, we do know something, and quite enough to give us great comfort. Let us just take up two thoughts. (1.) Christ's identification of himself with the case of need; and (2.) The active turn of that identification.

Jesus identified himself with the case. He might have said, it was no affair of his, as many a man would have done; that the people had come for their own advantage; that they should have been more prudent in not coming without provision, or in not staying so long. There were plenty of reasons why Jesus should not have helped the starving multitude, had he chosen to reason after the manner of men. But that is precisely what Jesus will not do; his thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our

ways. He knew how to look on the things of others as well as his own ; and, therefore, he wholly repudiated any such idea as that this need was no affair of his.

Might he not also have said that it was beside the purpose of his ministry to feed hungry men ? The Evil One, for ought we know, might have tempted him, and said, "Take high ground ; the kingdom of God is not meat and drink ; send the people away." But nothing was beside the purpose of Christ's ministry which was calculated to relieve the necessities of men's bodies, or to bring to bear a favorable influence upon their souls. That ministry took a wider range than our hard thoughts suspect : it embraced man in all his susceptibilities, and man in all his need.

Our Lord threw himself into the circumstances of others. He knew what it was to be an hungered in the wilderness ; and now he felt for those who were an hungered also.

Moreover, he had a thorough understanding of all the circumstances of the case. He not only knew what it was for the people to be hungry, but also what it was to be hungry in the wilderness ; how much the locality aggravated the need ; how much that need was intensified by the time it had lasted, so that the people were too weak to reach their homes, or places where they might have purchased food.

Thus Christ identified himself with the case ; and in doing so, he acted upon the very same principles as those which actuate him now. He is not changed ; he does not so absorb himself in our one great need, as to be unmindful of all our lesser needs ; he has a

place in his thoughts and his heart for all our woes and wants. Man allows himself to be absorbed by single ideas ; he has his departments out of which he either can not or will not act ; but Jesus embraces all in himself ; his mind embraces all, his heart feels for all.

How full of comfort is it that Jesus now throws himself into our circumstances ; he takes up, not only his stand-point of view, but ours ; he looks at matters as they present themselves to us. Jesus, looking at many things from his point of view, sees that there is no occasion for fear ; then, surveying them from our point of view, he sees all our fears. It may be the Saviour perceives that our apprehension comes from a want of faith, and is therefore guilty ; still he knows that there is apprehension ; he says to us, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" but he also says to winds and waves, "Peace, be still." Happy are we when we feel in good measure such an identification with the case of those whom we would comfort, as was here experienced by the Lord. Then we shall be able to comfort indeed ; the stricken heart will feel that it is understood ; it will bare itself to us, it will receive us into its confidence ; the iron gate shall open to us of its own accord ; we shall exercise the power of a perfect sympathy.

Next, let us look at *the active turn of Christ's identification of himself with the case of the hungry multitude.*

Jesus gave man many beautiful and true theories, but Jesus was no mere theorizer. Never was there one on earth who gave such practical examples of his

own rules, or so thoroughly carried out his own precepts. "If ye know these things," said he to his disciples, "happy are ye if ye do them." He knew the Father's will, and he did it too.

Everything in Christ was pre-eminently practical. As soon as he saw the need of the multitude, his impulse was to supply it: mere words he knew were of little worth. Jesus knew the bitterness of the mockery of using mere words of condolence without putting forth his power for relief; words under these circumstances are mere instruments of torture, — they add moral to physical distress. The test of feeling is not words but deeds. There was once a meeting held on behalf of a widow and orphans, and there was much talk, much declaration of sympathy and feeling, but little was forthcoming in the way of solid assistance. At last one man got up, and simply said, "I feel a hundred dollars; how much do you feel?" We need not apply his words; let us remember them, according to our means, as fitting occasions arise.

What life and reality does this view of a practical Christ throw into our religion, into our faith! We see our Lord an active and earnest, as well as an intelligent and sympathetic, being; hence we may look for results, and those such as are exactly suited to our need.

Jesus throws the feelings of his human nature into our need. He does not suppress those feelings as unworthy of him; in this case, he had known the sufferings of hunger, and he knew what those around him were probably then beginning to feel, what they must at any rate suffer from ere long. Here on

earth, there are many impediments to man's throwing the feelings of his nature into the sad cases of distress which come before him from time to time. There is pre-occupation with his own concerns, — these absorb him; they leave him little leisure for other persons' trials. This ought not so to be, but so it is. It may be, that he has sufferings of his own into which all his powers of feeling are thrown; and the trouble of others along with our own seem too much to bear. Perhaps the habitual sight of misery, ever meeting us wherever we turn, goes far towards blunting the sensibility of our nature, and we say, "How very sad," and then pass on. Or, it may be that the conscious limit of our means makes us put a curb upon our sensibilities, and forbids us to think, where we cannot help. Thus things ought not to be, but thus they often are. But none of these impediments affected Jesus; he had more to think of than any one on earth, but he entered too deeply into man's need to allow his mind to be absorbed with himself. He saw misery continually, and that, below the surface, deep down in its hidden springs and core; but the sight was always fresh, and touched him keenly to the quick; and then with unbounded means at his command, he gave those feelings their fullest scope, and so felt, as none save he could feel. This is what Jesus does here; and this is precisely what he will do in all our cases of need. We may feel assured that he will feel for us, not merely in a general way, but as regards each specific trial; that he will enter into these trials one by one, taking note of each peculiar point in them: of how they operate upon our

minds; of what nerves they cause to quiver, what muscles to relax. Jesus will understand us by himself; his own feeling will be the book in which he reads the story of our feelings; and thus, there will be a reality in his sympathy upon which our weak and wounded hearts may repose in peace.

This identification of Christ with our case is active, and, therefore, we may comfortably think that he will work. Ah, even whilst we are waiting upon our Lord, we are very often destitute of comfortable thoughts. We cannot say with the Psalmist, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." (Psalm xciv. 19.) We have anything but comfortable thoughts of Jesus. We are wondering whether any one will do anything for us — wondering whether *he* will; whether he will appear for us in time; how he will help. These are the thoughts which often pass through our unbelieving souls.

Did we but think of the active identification of Christ with his people, we should be spared all this; we should have comfort in our waiting time, — the comfort which must always flow from going to the fountain-head of his nature.

Only what he will do, and how he will do it, we must leave to himself. We are not to fix the most suitable time or method of his interference; we must not think him too slow in acting, nor must we presume to settle how much he is to do, or through what channels his bounty is to flow; enough must it be for us that he is seeing, feeling, understanding all about the matter, and therefore we may rest upon

him in peace. No doubt this often requires great faith ; but the standard of action must not be lowered because those who should act are so weak.

Is it not also a comfortable thought that what Christ has he has for others as well as himself? Jesus received power from the Father, that in him should dwell all the fulness of the Godhead bodily ; and in thus receiving for himself he received for us. For why was he man but for us ; and what could have been the object of the existence of such powers in the flesh but his relationship to us ? And in this Jesus shows us the stores which we possess ; in point of fact he says, “ What I have is yours, yours through me ; it is mine for my glory, it is yours for your supply.” The Father is acting through the Son ; and just as an earthly parent has what he has, not only for himself, but for his family, so the Great Father has what he has, not only for himself, but for us. He is the great proprietor of all ; the honor of possession is his but he gives to his people according as they have capacity to possess. God’s glory is not in keeping but in giving, — in giving through Christ all that he knows to be really for his people’s good.

Thus much, then, of Christ’s identification of himself with this case, and the active turn of that identification ; let us look next at —

The association of his disciples with himself in the work. Our Lord might have multiplied the slender provision available in this hour of need without the introduction of his disciples upon the scene at all. Had his object been self-aggrandizement, and the gratification of mere human pride, he would have

drawn the eyes of all upon himself by some striking method of performing the miracle ; but his simple object was now to supply their wants ; and, though he could not associate his disciples with himself in the exercise of divine power, still he could make use of them in the distribution of the benefits it was about to confer.

They were to have community of sentiment with him. His idea was that the multitude should be fed ; that was to be the disciples' idea too, but an idea emanating from him, one of which he was the fountain head. What an honor it is to be allowed to enter into the lofty thoughts of Jesus, to think as he thinks, to have a greatness of design like his. And this honor may now be ours. Many are now the associates of Christ, fellow-workers with him. He the head and source of all power and successful action, and they, the workmen under him.

It is very blessed, indeed, to be thus honored by our Lord ; this will compensate for a want of earthly associates, for a want of being understood by men ; this will carry us through much arduous work, which can only be accomplished by nearness of fellowship with him ; we should be infinitely stronger if we looked well at our fellowship with Christ.

Then, in associating his disciples with himself, our Lord made them the carriers out of divine thought. The divine thought was to have pity on the multitude, and Christ used the disciples' hand to carry that thought out. This is precisely what is done now : the bread which is sent from divine hands is distributed by human. We help the helpless in the

name of the Lord, and thus carry out a purpose of mercy from above. If we yield ourselves into God's hand, asking him to direct our almsgiving, or our visits of mercy, or if we follow what is plainly and forcibly laid upon our minds by him, we, like the disciples, shall carry out the divine thought. And in doing so, we shall be expositors of divine love. Men will trace the morsel we break to them up to the hand whence first it came, and we shall take care to impress upon them that what we bring them is not from us, but through us from Him. Men often irreverently use the phrase "a God-send," but that is a beautiful expression when used aright. Let us tell those we help, that we bring them "a God-send;" and let us direct their eyes straight away from ourselves to God. To give is no doubt very pleasant to ourselves, but let us take care that it is honoring to the Lord. If we are privileged to be expositors of God's mind and love, that is the position which we should take up.

Let us now look, in the next place, at *the paucity and poverty of the means at the disciples' command*. These come out very forcibly, both in this miracle, and in the previous one in Mark vi; and we must notice them, because from them immediately proceeded the unbelieving "Whence." In Mark vi, as here, man's resources come out in all their poverty. The only idea of the disciples was to get rid of the multitude, — to throw them upon their own resources: "Send them away that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy them-

selves bread ;” and when our Lord tells them to give the people to eat, they say to him, “ Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat ? ” Two hundred pennyworth ! in all probability they had not so much as two hundred pence ; and even if they had, there would have been no small difficulty in getting with them the two hundred pennyworth. Even if the money were forthcoming, and the money’s worth, what could it do after all ? “ Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may *take a little*.” Afterward, when the five barley loaves and two small fishes were produced, the remark which they called forth was this, “ but what are they amongst so many ? ”

It frequently happens that God gives us a complete view of our own emptiness, poverty, and helplessness, before he gives a supply ; indeed, many of his people will tell us, that his first dealing with them has been to show them that all their own resources are vain. Those resources are produced ; they are counted up ; they are calculated ; the utmost to which they will stretch is credited to them ; and they completely fail in meeting the exigencies of the case. We may, perhaps, have no resources at all, or have the two hundred pence, *i. e.*, some resources, but such as are unavailable at present ; such as cannot be immediately turned into bread ; but in either case our poverty is apparent. A man may be poor with means as well as without them.

Let us not think that God means to distress us by this sight of our poverty ; he never willingly afflicts

the feelings of the children of men ; he has an object in view far different from this. What God means is to make us think ; he wills that we should look at the means in their scantiness, in order that we should learn to look off from them on his fulness ; we are to be shown that we have not, or that what we have is useless, in order that he may show, either how he can give where there is nothing, or else how he can make a very little go far indeed.

Ah ! we should not be kept so long looking *at* what is scant, if we were ready to look *off* ; we prolong our troubles by our forgetfulness or unbelief ; we have sometimes to suck out the last drop of wretchedness, before we have learned how wretched indeed are the earthly means. But we are happy if we learn the lesson at last ; when God's purposes of teaching have been fulfilled, he will show himself gracious, and we shall be helped.

All that the disciples could hope to do in this miracle recorded by St. John was to provide enough for every one to take a little. When the loaves and fishes were produced, their observation was, "What are they among so many ?" A *little* for each ! and what but this littleness of man's thoughts and hopes meets us continually ? We need not be surprised ; rather should we be surprised if it were otherwise. We naturally make visible means the limit of our expectations ; it is only when we rise above nature that we can look for anything great. "Whence" is a word ever meeting us, ever clamoring for an answer, ever challenging our reason, ever appealing to it, ever limiting by sight ; and the word often is

echoed back dismally upon our saddened hearts. Many a time is this question asked with every show of reason ; and if we attempt to give it any answer save such as we can get from the lips of Christ, we shall utterly fail. Yes, we shall fail ; but, if we know God, we shall be able to do what the case demands, according to our means, and be at peace. This was the knowledge that Falk had when he so stoutly addressed his children of the "Rough-House," and took in as an additional burden upon his slender resources, an unpitied, starving, way-worn, dog-bitten child.

"It was a time of great scarcity, almost famine, and prices were so high that Falk did not know how he was to get bread for his children ; when a poor boy came into the Sunday school on crutches, and said, weeping, 'No one pities me. The dogs have often fallen on me, and bitten me. Dear sir, for Christ's sake, pity me, and let me have some rest. Put me in a workshop ; I will be good. I will be a tailor or anything you like. Only take me in.' 'Dear children,' said Falk, 'the times are hard ; but I will send none of you away, and I will take the stranger from far off in. And I tell you — and now think of it — blessing will flow richly in upon our house ; and God, who led Ludwig Minner over the Thuringian forest in snow and rain, has not led him in vain to us, and he will provide bread, not only for him, but for us all.' And before the next Sunday, a tailor had taken Minner into his workshop, and the Prince of Rudolstradt had sent a donation of five hundred crowns."

"A little" would have been perhaps a solitary crust,

and forth poor Ludwig must have gone to the dogs, and the cold and hungry world again ; but Falk met this “ whence ” by looking steadily at God, and then he found provisions as well as peace.

And when a man was wanted to fill up an important post (and men, that is, the right kind of men and women, are far more difficult to get than money), Immanuel Wichern met the pressing “ whence,” which must have thrust itself upon him every day by working quietly on, believing that at any critical moment God would be his helper. The critical moment came, and with it the expected help.

“ In the midsummer of 1834, when the first boys were busy finishing their first house, a young Swiss was led to join his fortune with theirs. His opportune arrival solved a difficulty that threatened to be serious. In a few days there were to be two households, but Wichern could not be so easily divided. While he superintended one, what was to be the fate of the other ? The difficulty was imminent, yet it had been long foreseen. The conception of the Rough-House involved separate households, and these again separate superintendence. If the experiment should meet with even moderate success, helpers would soon be wanted. And from the outset, Wichern, his mother, and sister were alone. Nevertheless, having determined his duty, he had begun his work ; not at all in a spirit of folly and headstrong obstinacy, but with a hearty trust in God. He had measured his own resources, he knew they must prove insufficient ; but he knew also there were resources in his Father’s keeping, which defied measurement : and he worked quietly

on, believing at any critical moment God would be his helper. He had faith and prayer; God has the hearts of all men in his hand. While he was still without any prospect of aid, while the future of his undertaking depended on that aid, and while the issue was narrowed down to a few days, young Baumgärtner came from a most unlikely and remote quarter; from the slopes of the distant Alps. He became the centre round which the new family of boys rallied, and the starting-point for a new organization. And thus, the brothers as well as the children traced back their origin to the same humble beginning, in faith and prayer. From that time workers poured steadily in, in no great crowd, yet in such numbers as to assume the position of a separate body, and to carry out separate aims." — *Praying and Working*, pages 172, 3.

Whenever we think of only doing a little, or that we can only do a little, we are almost sure to end by something mean and small. When God is able to multiply loaves, we shall be thinking only of distributing crumbs.

This brings us to the consideration of —

Human limitations to divine power, the point prominently brought before us by this word "Whence." God has been provoked by this continually.

Even his servant Abraham limited him when he said in his heart, "Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? and shall Sarah that is ninety years old bear?" And the Israelites spake against God; they said, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? behold, he smote the rock that the

waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed: can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?"

It may seem to us a light thing to distrust God in such a common matter as "bread;" but Satan thought it worth his while to make this one of the great temptations of our Lord in the wilderness; and Jesus thought it worth his while to endure privation in order to vindicate God's providence in so small a matter as common food. That was a sore punishment which God inflicted on the unbelieving lord for distrusting his word on this very point; and if he was jealous of his honor in being disbelieved by this wicked man, how much more will he be, if he be disbelieved by us? "Then Elisha said, hear ye the word of the Lord: thus saith the Lord, to-morrow, about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria. Then a Lord on whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven might this thing be? And he said, Behold thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." (2 Kings vii. 1, 2.) That man lived long enough to know the truth of what God had said, but not long enough to have the enjoyment of it; for "the people trode upon him in the gate; and he died." In marked contrast to this unbelief is the simple faith of Elijah. All the means of producing food were cut off. He himself was a consenting party. He knew the fulness of the meaning of those words, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be

dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” (1 Kings xvii. 1, 2.) And what about himself? God said, “Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith that is by Jordan; and it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went, and did according to the word of the Lord; for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is by Jordan.” For many a long day did the prophet trust that handful of meal in the barrel, that drop of oil in the cruise. He looked from the handful on earth to the hand in heaven; and, linking the two together, he lived in God-honoring faith and peace.

The faith of Elijah was not, however, that of the disciples’ here. They did not know how much their master could do with a little; yea, how much, even without any foundation to go upon at all. They talk of “buying;” their *only* thought was of supply in the *ordinary* way. Now the disciples were not wrong in thinking of the ordinary way of supplying the multitude; this idea of purchase is the one that would have occurred naturally to their minds; their fault lay in not seeing something beyond. The law of faith, whilst it introduces the extraordinary, does not scorn the ordinary, or forbid any dealings with it. On the contrary, it would be presumption to seek for the extraordinary while the ordinary was at hand; but, when the ordinary fails, then to see no hope, no possibility of doing anything! here begins failure and unbelief. So far as ordinary means were available, Christ used them, albeit they were utterly inadequate to the task before them; it may be to teach

us this very lesson, that we too must use what Providence puts within our reach, leaving to God's blessing the power of its accomplishing far more than we could expect.

To buy, — to give money, and get bread, — to part with what they had, ere they could procure what they had not; this was the only thought in the disciples' mind: Christ's higher thought was that of giving without anything; and into that thought they were now about to be led. Where man barter, God gives.

Now, as to ourselves, let us not be bound down to the limit of the seen, — the shop where bread is sold, and the money wherewith bread is bought. We do not underrate the importance of either; we only say that it is wrong for believers to limit their thoughts and their hopes to what is ordinary, within the ken of the daily routine of sense. There is an extraordinary, a vast circle in which influences are at work, far beyond the reach of human sight, or the comprehension of human thought; and it is no small advantage to have the belief of this firmly ingrafted in the mind. This will supply the answer to our unbelieving "Whence," when human instrumentality is utterly at fault. The greatness of the multitude represents the vastness of the work to be done; the fewness of the loaves and fishes typifies the smallness of the means; the desert nature of the locality minds us of how unfavorable are surrounding circumstances; no wonder, if from all these there comes forth an uncomfortable "Whence," — a "Whence" which, in fact, it is impossible for human reason to

answer at all. Yes! let us believe firmly that God has extraordinary ways in which he can act, if he see fit. We must not, because of such unbelief, make absolutely sure that he will act; for to do so may be ruin and not blessing to us; but this much good we shall assuredly get by such a belief; we shall enter into peace, for we shall say, "If it be good, he can and will accomplish it; if it be bad, he will not; and by his not acting I shall know that there are reasons unknown to me, but well known to him; and I can be cheerful in the deep assurance that it is all ordered for the best."

It is here precisely, when entering upon the extraordinary, that our faith so often and so sadly fails. And yet a little thought might be the means, with God's blessing, of doing away with much of this unbelief. The extraordinary is not always the miraculous; there is an answer for the "Whence," even without repeating the actual miracle of the loaves. "The horse-shoe nails," says professor Playfair, "dropped in the street during the daily traffic, reappear in the form of swords and guns. The clippings of the travelling tinker are mixed with the parings of horses' hoofs from the smithy, or the cast-off woolen garments of the poorest inhabitant of a sister isle: and soon after, in the form of dyes of the brightest blue, grace the dress of courtly dames. The bones of dead animals yield the chief constituent of lucifer matches. The dregs of port-wine carefully rejected by the port-wine drinker, in descanting his favorite beverage, are taken by him in the morning, in the form of Seidlitz powders, to remove the effects of his

debauch. The offal of the streets, and the washings of coal gas, reappear, carefully prepared in the lady's smelling bottle." Show an ignorant man these apparently worthless substances, and their proceeds, and he will scarce believe when you tell him that they are cause and effect, — that they are some of nature's strange answers to our ignorant "Whence?" And what are we but ignorant, ever prone to doubt what God can do? what strange results he can produce? what secrets he can unveil for our blessing or relief?

Yes; there are many secrets with which God is acquainted, which can be brought to bear upon our need. He knows how to combine circumstances so that some event, calculated to bring about what we need, may occur; how to influence a heart or hearts, so that they may be turned towards us in favorable affection and thought. "Whence" will come to Joseph release from his prison house? it comes from the combined dreams, — the sleep of the butler, the baker, and the king. "Whence" shall safety come for Mordecai, when the gallows are already made on which he is to be hanged? it comes from the fact that the king in this case cannot sleep at all. Now by an enemy, now by a friend; now by beams from the hot sun, now by droppings from the black thunder cloud; to-day by storm, to-morrow by calm, — the One with whom nothing is impossible answers the "whence" of man. What we call "chance" is often but the combinations or the manifestations of the extraordinary, the puttings forth of the fingers of the hand of Him with whom nothing is impossible.

"I shall never want, because my God will supply my every need," was the common saying of a poor woman in dark and troublous times of persecution for the faith. She was seized and taken before a judge for attending divine worship. "Now," cried he, tauntingly, "I have often wished to have you in my power. I shall send you to prison, and then how will you be fed?"

"If it be my Heavenly Father's pleasure," she said, "I shall be fed from your table." And that was literally the case; for the judge's wife, being present at her examination, was greatly surprised with the woman's firmness, and took care to send her provisions from her table; so that she was comfortably supplied all the time she was in confinement: and the friend whom the Lord raised up for her found her reward; for the Lord converted her soul, and made her glad with his salvation. A good man, persecuted for the truth, hid in a loft, and was even touched by the swords of his pursuers, as they probed the straw to find if he were under it; and day by day there came a hen to that spot, and laid an egg, which supported his life until he could escape. But why need we multiply instances? All persons with their hearts, all animals with their instincts, all natural objects with their properties are known to God; they are his purse, out of which he takes and gives, combining and severing, multiplying and diminishing, as he sees fit.

And these limitations of which we have been speaking are met with in the matters of the soul as well as of the body. "Whence," "whence,"

poor short-sighted, unbelieving man is always crying out.

In the consideration of this subject, let us not confine ourselves to the temporal need, and the temporal mercy, chronicled here by the evangelist. There is something of deeper importance than these underlying here, as in all Christ's miracles, the outward surface of man's need and of his gracious help. Let us turn aside awhile to hear the sad "Whence," so often uttered by the soul. The writer of these pages echoes the thought of Rauschenbusch, "What can a deliverance from all bodily distress avail us, if we are encompassed with trouble of spirit?" *

* "Thus he chose one day to preach upon the gospel concerning the feeding of the four thousand; it was just at the time when there was a scarcity in the place. He intended to preach Christ Jesus as the deliverer in all *earthly* need, but could not, with all his meditation, come into a clearness that satisfied him. Then thought he, 'What can a deliverance from *all bodily distress* avail us, if we are encompassed with *trouble of spirit*? I will preach how Jesus delivers from all spiritual distress and want.' And lo! there was a woman present who had been a great sinner (a person of respectable family, and who had come from a considerable distance), on whose soul some heavy burden lay. She wanted to know about the forgiveness of her sins, and the voice of some Christian preacher was required to announce it to her. And though there was, at that time, many an honest preacher, yet those she had met with had not been able to gain her confidence. She would fain have sought out Bogatzky, but, meanwhile, she heard that he was gone into eternity. She imagined at last that the true clergy were to be found only in the Romish church, and that only therein could she unburden her heart! In this perplexity she comes to Bünde, on the day when Rauschenbusch addressed the congregation upon distress of spirit. The hymn, which was previously sung, announced to her that the minister was going to preach upon a deeply interesting subject; then Rauschenbusch stepped into the pulpit, pale as he at that time was, and in all the high seriousness of his nature. Now did she begin to feel a hope, and she thought to herself, 'He seems to be one who knows spiritual distress.' She heard him, and felt herself powerfully influenced by the spirit and unction wherewith he spake; and after the sermon she hastened to him, and determined to think no more of becoming a Romanist. She soon found the consolation of divine forgiveness, but was continually experiencing her path to be a difficult one, and Rauschenbusch continued to act as her conducting friend." — *Memoir of Rauschenbusch*, p. 105.

“Human limitations to divine power!” By these we have injured God’s honor and our own comfort; and by our too frequent use of words similar to those which meet us in the text, we have (to say the least of it) shown that our faith is very small.

Now, these limitations, we would first of all observe, are variously developed. We limit in *degree*, as though God and Christ could go to a certain extent, but were barred any progress beyond; we limit in *kind*, as though there were some things which they could give but some which they could not. Like the disciples in the passage before us, we see that much is to be done; like them we see no apparent means; and “*Whence*” is the word which our unbelief pronounces at times in all the agonies of despair.

We can well picture to ourselves the dismay with which the disciples beheld the famishing condition of this multitude, and the wonder with which they heard Christ even hint at their being fed. They had the seven loaves and two small fishes, but what were they amongst so many? There were four thousand to be sustained. They did not wish to eat their morsel alone, they would have shared it with any that were in want; but what use was breaking such slender provision amongst such a host. It is this very thing that we are continually doing ourselves. We see that there are apparent means for such and such a result, but then we stop; we cannot trust any farther than we can see. Some men see salvation for a certain amount of sin, but beyond that they cannot persuade themselves that anything can be done. We limit the mercy of God by some bound-

any line of our own, — one which we found not in Scripture, — which God never put into our hands, and one which brings us continually into distress.

But why should we see salvation for a certain amount of sin, and nothing more? Why should we apply any measuring line at all to the mercies of the infinite God? If we have not sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost, there is redemption, not only to a certain amount, but to any amount. Neither the multitude nor the wilderness, the number of our offences, nor the desolation of our state, need be any hindrance to our peace. Let no man limit in his own case the salvation which God offers to him now. Let him not secure his own ruin by believing that he has gone beyond the reach of divine power. Though his sins were as scarlet, they can be made as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they can become as wool. Nor may we put any limitation to divine power and mercy, by reason of the circumstances in which we are placed. “Granted” (says some one) “that I can be saved though my amount of sin be great; yet are there not *certain circumstances* which are too unfavorable for any hope?” What! limiting again? again looking around at the wilderness, and the multitude, and not at Christ? It was the wilderness that was the stumbling-block to the disciples; and you make your peculiar circumstances a stumbling-block to you. “Whence” (you say) “can I look for salvation, when I have a hard and uneven heart; whence, when I have a naturally inconstant spirit; whence, when I have no stores of grace, when I am so dead. Men of a more lively

temperament of mind may be able to love ; men of a more constant spirit may be able to cling fast ; but whence can any good come to me when I am so eminently powerless in myself ? Had I this or that frame of mind, then I might hope ; but as I have it not, I see no ground of hope." But what are any circumstances, that under them we should be led to limit the power of Christ ? Is it not in his power to save by a few as well as by many ; to help under circumstances of the most perfect impotence, as well as when we enjoy our fullest strength ? Were the circumstances of the case any hindrance to the deliverance of Jacob from Esau ; of the Israelite seed from the bondage of the Egyptian ; of Hezekiah and Jeremiah from Sennacherib ; of the three children from the furnace ; of Daniel from the lion's den ; of any saint of God under trial or distress ? No, surely not ; and if Christ's miracles, and amongst them this one of feeding the multitude, were all wrought when everything seemed adverse to their success, what were they all but a lesson to each of us, that our eyes must be fixed on the Deliverer, and on him alone ; and, that as far as mere outward things are concerned, we must not look upon them at all. Let this, then, be an encouragement to all of us who are downhearted because others seem to have more natural advantages than ourselves. To keep looking at ourselves is to limit the degree of the power of God ; it is as though we said, " What likelihood is there ? and if we can see no likelihood, we will not trust." And let us consider one fact which will perhaps influence us to this. No man that is really under the

teaching of the Holy Ghost sees any "likelihood" in himself at any time. It is an especial sign of his having been taught of the Holy Ghost, when he can see nothing in himself of any description or kind that is likely to forward his salvation in the least. All spirit-taught men reject every such thing; they say with the apostle, "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing."

But, perhaps, a man's limitation of divine power might develop itself in another way: he might have come to this, that he believes most firmly that there is no amount of sin which cannot be pardoned, but he says, I can believe *only when I see some proportion between the means and end*. I acknowledge that the end to be obtained — my salvation — is very great. I see that the amount of sin to be rolled away is awful in its extent; but I feel that I require some evidence of a proportion between the means used and the end to be produced.

Now, if we cannot trust God to do his own work in his own way, of this we may be assured, that he will never condescend to inform us of all the intricacies of the method in which he carries on that work. It is his glory to refer us to himself, and not to his means; to fix our eye upon his own power, and not upon the instruments he employs. At one time he will use *more* means, and at another *less*; at one time he takes five loaves for five thousand, and twelve baskets of fragments are gathered up; at another, there are seven loaves amongst only four thousand; and but seven baskets of fragments are left. "How is it," says Jesus, to these bewildered, doubting

ones, even as he said to his disciples of old, "that ye do not understand?" We must not look for any outward or visible proportion between the means and end; we must not say, "I will not believe that God can save me unless he steps forth visibly in the magnificence of his power." What folly it is to look for this! If such manifestations were made, the whole world would be saved; who could resist? What scope would there be for the life of faith? What is the end that God designs? The purification of our hearts on earth, the blissful immortality of our souls in heaven: must we see a legion of angels charge in with flashing brightness upon our hearts before we will believe that God can subdue them? Must we see the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof, as Elisha saw of old, before we will believe that God can take us to the glory that is on high! If we are waiting for demonstrations like these, we may wait forever. We may say "Whence" a myriad times over, but we shall have no answer from the Lord. "What then?" it will be said; "shall faith throw all reason overboard; and shall we know nothing of *the grounds* on which we are to trust?" Surely not! God wills by all means that we should use our reason, and he directs us where it can be most profitably applied. He shows us means enough, if we will only look in the direction in which he points; and this is not to the wilderness or to anything around. The disciples in this emergency should have thought of the power of Christ, and it is on this that God will have us now rely. Here, indeed, shall we find a proportion between our salvation and the method

by which it is secured. If it be a great thing to be saved, to have our souls rescued from the power of evil spirits, to have the vengeful arm of God's law removed from us, to be raised up to sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, were not the means by which these were obtained great also? What was Christ but an army in himself? what were his displays but those of omnipotence? what was death but one of infinite satisfaction? here, if we have *reason* to look for them, and *faith* to see them, are means enough. And hither let us direct the eyes of any who are saying, "Whence. Whence?" From the cross where Jesus died. "Whence?" From the throne where Jesus reigns. "Whence?" From the infinite depths of his loving heart; from the infinite strength of his mighty arm. So that if it be a great thing to be saved, as indeed it is, there is also a great Saviour, by whom it can be done.

Let us point out a further limitation of the divine power which has often resulted in great wretchedness and misery to ourselves. We seem *to trust God for all mercies but the one immediately required*. The disciples knew that Jesus could *heal*, and perhaps in no sick case would they have doubted the *ability* of their Lord; but here, when necessity pressed hard, a blindness seemed to come over their faith. And thus it is often with all of us. We are like men afflicted with sharp pain in one part of the body. We say, "Oh, I could endure it, if it were anywhere else!" or, like men who are laboring under some particular calamity, we say, "Oh, if it were any other, I could bear it!" or, like men who want some par-

ticular thing, and say, "I could put up with any want but that." There is many a man who can trust God for his health and strength, who cannot trust him for his food and raiment; many an one who firmly believes that the Lord will bring him safe to heaven at last, who cannot depend upon him in some present trial of the body or the soul. To such men, every calamity *that is not on them* seems light and easy to be committed to God in faith, *any one that presses* is the hardest and most insurmountable of all, and cannot be made the subject of faith. We are like the disciples: bread was what was immediately wanted; and they say, "Whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" and because they were "in the wilderness," it therefore was not to be had. Like Israel, of whom we read in Psalm lxxviii, we speak against God; we say, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold he smote the rock that the water gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?"

Let us be reminded how easy it is for us to deceive ourselves. If we cannot trust for the mercy we want now, what security have we that we can trust for the mercy we may want next? if we are trusting and depending in the points in which God is not trying us, what glory can we bring to him in the one in which he is trying us but in which we have no faith? And with all our professing, how great our unbelief is can be seen from *our continual unhappiness in spiritual things*. There is always some one point in which our faith is being tried; and about that, we are often

wretched and miserable and low ; we may rest assured we shall be thus *always* tried about *some one* point, and if that be the one in which we are always to fail, there remains no prospect before us but one of continual grief. What we should do is this : not only to enjoy what we have, but by faith to trust for what we have not, no matter what it be, whether it be the blessing of communion, or the grace of great love, or of peace and joy. Let us see the secret springs of power in Jesus, and then ask, not unbelievably, *whence* what we want shall come, even though we be in the very wilderness itself.

And before we leave this part of our subject it is to be observed, that we limit the mercy of our Lord in another respect. We do not think that we shall have *a sustaining daily mercy, which shall continue with us to the very last*. That which we require is like the bread, which is necessary for the very support of life ; and we are often saying, “ *Shall I have that ?* ” By some strange perversion of the mind we believe in all *extraordinary grace*, but for *common, every-day grace* we doubt. We are like men who have a regular income from their king on which to live, who now and again have received a great present from their patron’s hand, and who doubt whether he will continue his daily munificence to them, though they have no doubt but that from time to time he will be liberal to them, and give them gratuities again.

All this is unbelief, and it is as much so in eminent saints as in any others. And why should we think that we have no *sustaining mercy* from the

Lord? that he will not feed us *day by day*? that he will not nourish and cherish our souls with what is necessary for their very daily life? Why are we always thinking that God will let us droop, be famished in the wilderness, and die? We must not be distrustful for what we might call *the bread* of our soul, — that without which we cannot live. Such mercy and such power as this shall continue with us every day. It might be unperceived, being as plain as the bread we daily eat; but it shall not fail.

Let us observe further that *all these limitations of the divine power proceed from the same source*. Although one man is developing them in one way, and some other man in a different way, one spring supplies the materials for them all. The fact is, that our non-apprehension of Christ's divinity has much to say to all the sins we commit in this respect, and consequently to all we have to bear. For want of seeing his omnipotence, and of believing that he is untrammelled by any circumstances, we are reduced to the greatest straits. Let us just observe further (although we shall consider this matter more fully in the succeeding chapter), that our not remembering former mercies, vouchsafed to others or ourselves, loses us much of the comforts we otherwise might enjoy. Do we so soon forget how often he has drawn out our confessions of impotence before now? and how he has opened himself out according to the different circumstances in which he was placed? Why should we be ever saying, "‘Whence’ can this or that be done?" when we know what Christ has wrought for ourselves in by-gone days? when the ex-

perience both of others and of ourselves goes to prove, that never was there any position of trial in which Christ was placed, from which he did not emerge with safety to us, and with credit to himself? Have we been sick in our souls, and at the point of death; then we put him to the test as a physician, and he came forth from the ordeal with fresh renown. Have we been ever tossed to and fro upon the stormy seas, and have we proved his power to allay the tempests' rage? Did it ever dare to stir when he said, "*Peace be still?*" Have we ever been in want of the cup of divine consolation, or the bread of divine strength, without his providing the one for us as he did for the guests at the wedding, and the other, as he did for the famishing multitudes in the wilderness? And let us be persuaded that whereinsoever we have occasion to try our Lord, he will not fail. All earthly props and staffs may break, but the bread which is the staff of spiritual life shall not be destroyed. Let the starved whose strength is well nigh gone but come to Christ, and he will feed them; let them have come into the wilderness to seek him; let them have tarried many days with him; let them but hang upon his lips which are full of grace and truth, but forget, if need be, even the wants of the present life in him; and where they thought there was nothing but the stone, they shall find that there is bread; and when to all human appearance nothing but death in his most horrible form confronts them, they shall find life.

Surely, all our limitations of the divine power and mercy can but end in the same results. Perplexity,

depression, unsteadiness, and a thousand evils such as these, must follow hard upon our unbelief. Let us but measure Christ by our own rule, and apply our own fancies as the standard of either his mercy or his power, and then instead of *faith* we shall have *speculation*; the question must cease to be, “*Will* Christ show himself gracious?” and the heart shall be racked and torn with the unbelieving doubt, “*Can* Christ reach *me* either by this mercy, or this might?”

There may be some of the readers of these pages who, unknown to themselves, are taking up the expression of the text. Such are “here in the wilderness,” and bleak and barren is everything around. Their accustomed sources of supply have failed, and they look round in vain for anything to fill up their place. Here is one who once possessed what made his heart leap with joy, so that his dwelling was ever as it were in the midst of a garden whose fruits regaled his taste, and whose gorgeous hues half dazzled his bewildered sight; but lo! the garden has vanished quite away, and instead of it the wilderness is now around. While home and property and friends all lasted, then there remained nothing for him to do but as it were sit down to eat and drink, and rise up to play. But now how changed has everything become! Instead of trees, he has but rocks; instead of the running brook, the shifting and half-scorching sand. Alas! what were formerly the elements of his happiness now become the chief instigators of his grief. A change has come on old friends and scenes, just like that which passes over the sunny sky and gilded domes of the dissolving view, when they grow

misty and confused before our eyes, and we see the pinnacle of some sun-lit palace change into the summit of an iceberg whose dreariness is increased by the pale shining of the moon, while the gorgeous figures which clustered around that palace's massive gates grow misty and confused themselves, and become frozen spires, which add at once to the desolation and the wonder of the scene. Thus, thus has the garden changed into the wilderness. The same eyes which once shot forth the beams of love, now shine with the flashings of anger, or the cold glassy stare of indifference; the same hands which once grasped us with the warm embrace of love are now clenched with hate, or held back with distrust or with dislike; the very tongue that was once eloquent with the tones of confident affection is now charged with the sharp accents of contumely or scorn. "Whence, verily, shall a man be satisfied with bread in a wilderness like this?" If this be the condition of any reader, let him remember that, in the wilderness, the voice of Christ was heard; that in the wilderness the multitude were fed; that though it should not please God to work any miracle upon these stones, and change them into bread; that though he should leave them to the very end of a man's life in all the cold and nakedness of their present deformity, still man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

And what is thus said to such as are in the wilderness of worldly sorrow is said also to such as are in spiritual grief. They who are looking around in vain to find something that will allay the cravings of

their heart ; they who are ever saying "*Who will show us any good?*" we would entreat to seek that good from Christ. Do not fix your eyes upon the poor loaves which men hold in their hand, and the morsel of bread which they can give ; but, as your necessity is great, look up to Christ himself. "*Whence!*" "*Whence!*" you say. We answer you "*from Jesus.*" Thence can all men be *satisfied*, even though their condition be one of hunger and helplessness the most complete. Here, verily, even in the wilderness, have we found that fruit which elsewhere is so often vainly sought. There are some who are old, and who have sought it all their life, but they have not found it ; and there are some who are young, and who shall seek it for many a bitter year, and not find it, because they seek it not in Jesus. *Whence can a MAN satisfy these MEN?* See the whole world expectant, open-handed, open mouthed, like the grave itself, forever crying, *Give us more ;* and who or what is sufficient to stay its voice ? We say "*No, person, no thing on earth.*" Gold will not satisfy avarice ; nor honor, ambition ; nor fruition, love ; nor attainment, energy. "*All things (said the wise man) are full of labor ; man cannot utter it, the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing ;*" but if we want the question solved, and an answer produced which the warrior could not trace with the point of his sword, nor the philosopher with his ocular pen ; if we would know how men are fed in a wilderness, how they are satisfied there ; how they are given that which shall sustain them, though they be many, on their journey home ;

then we answer them, that the very knot of the riddle supplies the element for its solution. Forasmuch as you ask how *a man* can do this thing, we answer that by *a man alone* it can be done; for the one Mediator between God and man, *the man* Christ Jesus has given himself a ransom for all; *this man* having offered one sacrifice for sin forever, has sat down on the right hand of God; from that right hand he uses his power for the salvation of his people, and from thence, working a miracle of grace, he satisfies with bread all who gather round him in the barren and unprofitable wilderness of earth.

But we must return to our narrative, and inquire *What did these means accomplish?* The “Whence” having been answered practically by Christ, great were the results which ensued. The four thousand were satisfied with bread and fish, — they were filled; “and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.”

The means were small, but *they were used*. The disciples were obedient. Although they had not sufficient faith to throw the multitude upon their Lord in the first instance, they yet had faith enough to obey his commands, and so become the honored instruments of his power. Now, although, there was undoubted failure in the disciples’ faith, in not casting the case originally upon their Lord, still we must not look only at this failure; we must see also their obedience, in which undoubtedly faith subsequently came forth.

There are many who have not the faith to originate great things, who yet have faith to carry out the

evident will of God. God is very good ; he does not despise the smaller measure when it is willing to act. He uses us according to our capacities if we are only willing to be used. The fact of the disciples' not rising to the emergency at once was no reason in Christ's eyes why they should not do something afterwards. Obedience, even with a dimness of faith, will assuredly be honored and blessed. Jesus might have put the disciples altogether aside. He might have said, "As you did not think of thus supplying the wants of the multitude, you shall have nothing to do with the matter ;" but he knew whereof they were made ; that they were but flesh ; that they had yet much to learn ; and he dealt generously and lovingly by them. Now we must follow the example of our Lord. There are many persons who cannot originate a large plan of usefulness, and who, if it be originated, are greatly troubled about the "Whence," as to the means whereby it is to be carried out, who yet are willing afterwards to take their part in the work. They cannot provide, but they can help to put to use what is provided ; and they are willing so to do. We must not remember against such persons their initial weakness ; we must not say, "We don't want such as you ; you are not strong enough in faith." No ; we must use them so far as they can be used, and perhaps very useful they will become. Our Lord could easily have caused each man's portion of the loaves and fishes to have been spread miraculously before him ; but the disciples were fitted for this work, and so he employed them. Obedience of faith is precious as well as originality of faith ; each

have their own place, and shall receive their reward.

The disciples were *unquestioning* also in their use of the appointed means. Their Lord was now about to act, and although they never could have originally thought of his acting in this way, and perhaps even now were not altogether clear as to what he was about to do, still they did as they were told; and so, in their way, became promoters of the blessing of the multitude. If we arrive at simply an unquestioning state of mind, no doubt this is acceptable to God; it does not follow that because it is unquestioning it must be free from perplexity. Jesus knows that much evil can intermingle with good; an unquestioning faith is one through which God can act. What is good in our faith Jesus will use; what is short, he will supply.

Had the disciples questioned the command of Christ, what hinderers would they have been of his action; what hinderers of their own honor; what hinderers of the multitudes' relief. Perhaps some of the crowd would have been overborne with hunger while they were reasoning with, or questioning, their Lord. Questioning always involves hindering, and it is especially mischievous when the time for action has come. Have not we often hindered by questioning? We must know whether the means were enough, and how they could be made enough, and all sorts of things; and we have found that one question started another, until it seemed that there would really be no end of them. If we will so far fall in with Satan's design as to indulge a questioning

spirit, we may rest assured that that Evil One will supply us with plenty of matter for questioning until, perhaps, the time of action has passed. We shall not know how much we have been befooled until it is too late in this particular to retrace our steps.

Then, again, as regards the use of the means, we find that the disciples were willing to be the Lord's instruments, leaving it to him to do what was to be done in his own way, whatever that might be. Now, that he had given intimation of his design to do something on behalf of the famishing multitude, they have faith enough to believe in his resources; and they make the men sit down by companies as they were told. The disciples do not pause, frightened, in the middle of their work. They do not say, as they make the men sit down, "What if it all come to nothing, and we appear as fools in the eyes of the people?" Nor, as they are dealing out the bread and fish, do they pause affrighted, lest the provisions should come short in their hands; no! their Master was at work, and they were at work under him, and therefore it must all turn out well in the end.

All this must be remembered, when we think of the use of that word "Whence" by the disciples; and we draw from it some teaching for ourselves. Can we leave Christ to act in his own way, being content to act under him, — the dispensers of that of which he is the provider? Can we practically believe that our Lord has ways and resources of his own, which often will not develop themselves until the moment of need, but which will unfold themselves then, and prove equal to the emergency? Can we fall in with

what is manifestly Christ's way ; and cheerfully, and boldly and heartily take our part in the work ? Can we say, " The Lord is working, and we must not slacken our hands ; we must not hold our hands until he holds his ? " If we can do this, then, in our subordinate capacity, we can carry on a ministry of faith ; our " Whence " is rebuked, but our services are accepted.

Neither let us forget the lesson taught us here, that we must always make use of the means we have. We must not waste our time in wishing we had this or that ; nor may we say, " We will not stir until we have this or that." Our duty is to proceed as best we can, with such instruments as we have, leaving the result with God. Moreover, we must seek a blessing on what we have, and not on what we have not. It was not the bread in the villages around that Jesus blessed, but what was immediately at hand ; it was little to seek a blessing upon, but not too little to be honored of the Lord. Until we try, we cannot tell how much can be done with how little.

Let us observe further, with regard to these means, that they passed through Christ's hand. There is danger on the one hand of exalting means unduly, and, on the other, of slighting them too much. In the present day the balance of danger inclines to the former of these two extremes. There is a tendency to make too much of moral influences ; to expect from social machinery what it never can effect. The world will be disappointed at the meagre result of much well-intentioned and skilfully planned effort ; it will try new schemes ; benevolence will assume the stand-

ing and position of a science ; but failure will be at the bottom of all. The truth is, moral and spiritual influences, though they may co-operate, and do co-operate, are by no means identical. The moral can never by itself penetrate into the spiritual being of man ; and it is from the spiritual that all deep, all root action proceeds for good or evil. The very men who are most loud in praising up and setting in motion moral instrumentality are often the loudest in decrying spiritual. They do not understand the food coming from Christ's hand first of all. They will break both bread and fish to the multitude, but not as received from him ; and, becoming worshippers of the means, those means will sooner or later fail them, and become like a broken reed in their hands.

When we have to use means, it is a matter of vast importance that they should come into contact with Deity, that they should be energized from heaven. That which passes through our Lord's hands will be sure to have a blessing ; what he will use, what he will bless, must insure success.

We can bring the means (when they are suitable) into such contact by prayer ; and we have no right to make use of any means upon which we cannot ask a blessing. Let our first care be to pass them through the hands of God ; then they will have God in them, and will continue, ever branching out with unbroken energy, until their work be done. We give an illustration from the history of the German Rough-House.

“ The year 1853 was one of excessive need, and a critical period for the house. Eight thousand marks were wanted for the expenses. There were various

mutterings without. 'Where is now their God?' 'Now they will go down.' 'Now we shall see what will become of this fine piety, and living by faith.' Friends were anything but sanguine. After thought and prayer, a brief statement was put into the '*Ffliegende Blätter*,' and the result was awaited in patience. It was extraordinary. A poor clergyman in Silesia sent half a dozen teaspoons; his wife a necklace, and ten farthings from some beggar children to whom she taught sewing. Some poor widows in Hamburg sent twenty-eight Hamburg shillings; an artizan from East Prussia, twenty francs, with Matt. xxv. 31-46; and this is written, 'The Lord who clothes the lilies will not forget the little ones of the Rough-House.' A class of poor children in the Duchy of Mark, thirty half farthings; a circle of poor children in Berlin, fifteen shillings. 'Thanks,' wrote one round a fifty-mark note, 'for the strengthening of our faith by the Rough-House.' 'My mother,' wrote another, 'read the "*Ffliegende Blätter*" yesterday; and told me to seal up ten crowns directly, and send it. Will you be able in these hard times? He who has sustained me sixty-four years, and given me more than I need, will not desert me now. Send it in faith.' A miner from Frieberg in Saxony, sent, greeting the whole house, and saying that down where he was, more than a hundred yards under the earth, there were hearts and hands raised to the Lord for it. From a poor Hamburg washerwomen there came nine groschen; and in a scarcely legible hand, 'I know you long, though you are not likely to know me; and I have

been saving long, that I might send some pence for the dear children.' And a child wrote, 'I have no more money in my saving-box. I want to send something. I have learned to knit. I and brother have knitted a pair of stockings.' Thus that faith was answered; and, out of the children's farthings and the rich men's pounds, there was received within three months three times as much as was required." — *Praying and Working*, pages 134, 5.

A simple statement brought through the hands of Christ into contact with divine power, produced thrice as much as was required.

The means which Jesus used *received a blessing from the Father*. In the miracle recorded in chapter vi., we are told that "He looked up to heaven, and blessed and brake the loaves;" and in St. Matthew's record of the miracle immediately under consideration, we read that "He took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks." The Father evermore honored the Son; and how assuredly will he honor the petitions in all hours of need preferred in his name; brought by him into contact with the Father's might. It is a very comforting thought, that in helping Christ's people, the Father honors Christ himself. Acting for Christ's sake is honoring Christ himself. Let this encourage us to draw Christ into our positions of need as they arise; to say, "I seek, O Father, through him whom thou delightest to honor, whom thou hearest alway. Give it unto Jesus for me! Pass it to me through his hand!"

The Father is evermore in union of sentiment with the Son. What is willed by the one is willed

by the other also. The compassionate sentiment of the Father here acted in unison with that of the Son, and so will it ever do. They are one, and their oneness is for us; and a knowledge of this would greatly help us, if we used it aright, in faith and prayer. Jesus said, "The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." (John xiv. 10.) "I knew that Thou hearest me always." (John xi. 42.) "I and My Father are one." (John x. 30.) Are not these blessed truths for us? and do they not give great assurance of power in the mediation of Jesus? All this we must apply in our work for God, and in the affairs of daily life. Means are to be used, but they must be in subservience to the Lord: their power must be attributed to their passage through his hand, and the blessing from the Father. Obedient, and unquestioning, let us act under Christ; and then we shall act with him, and we shall find that the day of marvels is not altogether past. It is said that "they who watch for providences shall never want a providence to watch;" so also might it be said, that they who watch for wonders of the Lord in his dealings, shall be shown them from time to time, wonders unseen by the eye of sense, disbelieved by human reason, and unappreciated by the human heart; but wonders which the spiritual eye shall see, and in which the spiritual heart shall rejoice.

We must not pass by the great fact that *these means thus used by Christ left a large blessing behind them*. After all had eaten, and were filled, "they took up the broken meat that was left seven baskets." The seven loaves, and the two little fishes, were,

doubtless, more in quantity at the end of this great feast than when they were first touched by Christ. No loss was sustained. Jesus does not impoverish, he makes truly rich. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth." "The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." Bread cast upon the waters may not be found for many days; but in God's good time it turns up.

A merchant in the United States said, in answer to inquiries relative to his mode of giving. "In consecrating my life anew to God, aware of the ensnaring influence of riches, and the necessity of deciding on a plan of charity before wealth should bias my judgment, I adopted the following system. I decided to balance my accounts as I could every month, reserving such portion of profits as might appear adequate to cover probable losses, and to lay aside by entry on a benevolent account, one-tenth of the remaining profits, great or small, as a fund for benevolent expenditure, supporting myself and family on the remaining nine-tenths, I further determined that if at any time my net profits, *i. e.* profits from which clerk hire and store expenses had been deducted, should exceed five hundred dollars in a month, I would give twelve and a half per cent; if over seven hundred dollars, fifteen per cent; if over nine hundred dollars, seventeen and a half per cent; if over thirteen hundred dollars, twenty-two and a half per cent; thus increasing the proportion of the whole as God should prosper; until at fifteen hundred dollars, I should give twenty-five per cent, or three hundred and seventy-five dollars a month. As capital was of

the utmost importance to my success in business, I decided not to increase the foregoing scale until I had acquired a certain capital, after which I would give one-quarter of all net profits, great or small; and on the acquisition of another certain amount of capital, I decided to give half; and on acquiring what I determined would be a full sufficiency of capital, then to give the whole of my net profits.

“It is now several years since I adopted this plan; and under it I have acquired a handsome capital, and have been prospered beyond my most sanguine expectations. Although constantly giving, I have never yet touched the bottom of my fund; I have repeatedly been surprised to find what large drafts it would bear. True! during some months, I have encountered a salutary trial of faith; when this rule has led me to lay by the tenth, while the remainder proved inadequate to my support. But the tide was soon turned; and, with gratitude, I have recognized a heavenly hand, more than making good all past deficiencies.

“This system has been of great advantage to me, enabling me to feel that my life is directly employed for God. It has afforded me happiness, in enabling me to portion out the Lord’s money; and has enlisted my mind more in the progress of Christ’s cause. Happy privilege! which the humblest may enjoy, of thus associating the common labors of life with the grateful service of the Saviour, and of making that which naturally leads the heart from God subserve the highest spiritual good.

“This system has saved me from commercial dan-

gers, by leading me to simplify business, and avoid extensive credits. It has made me a better merchant ; for the monthly pecuniary observations which I have been wont to take, though often quite laborious, have brought me to a better knowledge of the state of my affairs, and led me to be more cautious and prudent than I otherwise would have been. I believe the system tends to enlarge the Christian's views ; increase his disinterestedness, and lead him to shun the tricks of trade."

We need not multiply instances ; they abound in the history of the Church of God. Rich men have done much ; and poor men have done what was as much, and possibly more, for them ; and as their money passed through the hands of Christ, they found that after blessing others, it still left a blessing abundantly for themselves.

As these pages may fall into a poor man's hand, let us give one example from amongst the poor.

"A poor negro woman after the death of her husband had no means of support for herself and two little children, except the labor of her own hands ; yet she found means out of her deep poverty to give something for the promotion of the cause of her Redeemer, and would never fail to pay, on the very day it became due, her regular subscription to the church of which she was a member. In a hard winter she found a great difficulty in supplying the pressing needs of her little family ; yet the few pence for religious purposes had been regularly put by. As one season for the contribution came round, she had only a little corn, a single salt herring, and a five

cent piece remaining of her little store. Yet she did not waver. She ground the corn, prepared her little children's supper, and then with a light heart and cheerful countenance set out to service where she gave joyfully the five cents, the last she had in the world. Returning from the church she passed the house of a lady, to whom a long time before she had sold a piece of pork, so long indeed, that she had entirely forgotten the circumstances ; but seeing her this evening, the lady called her in, apologized for having been so tardy in the settlement, and then inquired how much it was. The poor woman did not know ; and the lady, determined to be on the safe side, gave her two dollars, besides directing her housekeeper to put up a basket of flour, sugar, coffee, and other luxuries for her use. The poor woman returned home with a joyful heart, saying, as she displayed her treasures, ' See my children, the Lord is a good paymaster, giving us an hundred-fold even in this present life, and in the world to come everlasting life ! ' "

This witness is true ; and this testimony can be corroborated by thousands of God's people, who can trace his hand in their baskets full which remain. By none of our goods have we been so much benefited, as by those which we have passed through the hands of Christ. The reproductive quality of the corn, as seed, seems to remain in it, even after it has been made into bread ; and as seed, it produces a harvest many times beyond itself. After being cast forth, it comes back in some form of blessing ; it may be in kind, or it may not ; it may be to the body or

the soul. God giveth it a body as pleaseth him ; and the particular form which the blessing takes is, we may be sure, the best for us.

In the blessing which was now abroad, we may believe that the disciples themselves partook. They, as well as the multitudes, were fed ; the ox was not muzzled that trod out the corn. Surely, we ourselves, when we do aught for Christ may become partakers of that which we are giving. We give joy to others ; we are privileged to partake of that joy ourselves. And one way of thus partaking is, to put ourselves, as it were, in the place of those to whom we are privileged to distribute the gifts of God. The disciples looked at the people eating ; saw the satisfaction and pleasure in their looks ; heard, no doubt, their expressions of gratitude and wonder ; and saw the perplexity, which was beginning to press upon them removed. St. Matthew tells us that there were "four thousand men, beside women and children." We may be assured that Jesus had noted those women and children ; probably there were amongst them special cases of need ; and the disciples, no doubt saw many a mother's eye kindle with gratitude, and many a little hand outstretch itself with eagerness and delight. Jesus gave the disciples a heart feast, a heart treat, heart food, and made their labor of distribution one of joy.

We too are disciples, and we have the same Jesus for our Lord ; and we have work from time to time to do akin to this which we are considering now. Let us be assured that we are entitled to the joy belonging to the work. To obtain this let us always

put ourselves for awhile into the position of those to whom we distribute the bounty of the Lord,—that which he has put into our hands to give. Let us think over their enjoyment,—how many things they will be able to get, or how much good any specific thing which we have bestowed upon them will do. With a very little imagination we can have the luxury of rejoicing in the enjoyment of others. We can easily imagine, as we feel our own warm garments in winter, how so-and-so is feeling as the bitter blast whistles and screams and chases the withered leaves which, withered though they be, seem as though they fled before it in fear; or as we stir our own bright fire we can associate the act with thoughts of some other bright fire that we have kindled by our Lord's command; and so we can warm ourselves at two fires at once,—our bodies at our own fires, our hearts at our neighbor's; and who will be so thoroughly warm as he who is warmed within and without; his body and his spirit; his whole man? Or if we feed the hungry at the command of Christ, then, as we think of their eating, when we ourselves sit down to eat, does not our own food seem to nourish us mysteriously? and even if with stricken bodies we turn away from it, yet are we fed, through others, being given a meat to eat which the world knows not of. And so through all acts of sympathy and kindness, which we do as immediately from the Lord, reflections from them all beam back upon ourselves. Let us not be afraid of sentimentalism, or of being carried away with our imagination, or of being the victims of unreality; we need not fear

tarrying too long upon the incidents of the joy of others, flowing to them through us ; it will do us a great deal of good ; and we can come to no spiritual harm, if we feel that we have done nothing of ourselves, that we have only done as Christ told us ; if we see him as well as the objects of his bounty — mark of *his* bounty ; for we are but servants under him, the dispensers of his provision. Let him but vanish from the scene, and a blight will come over it all.

It may be that some one feels, “ I too could have been kindled into enthusiasm by the sight of so much happiness as that distribution of bread must have bestowed upon the multitude.” This is probably true ; there is always something inspiring in the joy, something moving in the sorrow, of a crowd. But we, in all probability shall never be called upon to deal with a multitude. We must not think scorn of making one or two happy ; one family, or one individual, one man, one little child. Jesus wrought in little spheres as well as great ; his sunshine fell upon the smallest herb as well as on the noblest tree. The Saviour blessed individuals. The little daughter of the nobleman, as well as the strong servant of the centurion partook of his bounty ; he healed the ear of Malchus, as well as the plague-stricken body of the leper ; that solitary man who had no one to put him into the pool was cared for, as well as she who had a father and mother, and minstrels and people, to make a noise over her, and weep and wail greatly. That friendless woman, also, who slipped behind him in the crowd, and touched the hem of his garment,

had the same blessing as he who had friends so energetic in his behalf as to break through the roof, and let him down before Jesus in the midst. Oh! may Jesus be our pattern; so that we may be as we are called thereto by God a blessing to one or to many, evermore working under him, by him, and for him; when blessing others, then most blest ourselves.

And now, we draw this chapter to a close. We have seen the deep need of the multitude, the still deeper compassion of the Saviour; how small and insignificant were the means with which he had to work; how great and notable was the work he wrought. We have beheld how men would limit him by the littleness of what was seen; how he laid aside their trammels, and spread before them the wonders of the unseen. "*Whence* shall we buy bread?" was answered by a gift from the store whence the Holy One pours forth his treasures in time of direst need. The lesson which in stern accents the Son of God taught the Evil One in the wilderness, he now teaches with the voice of compassion to hungry ones in the desert. The mighty prince of evil and the fainting children of men are taught the one great lesson that "man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

What now remains but that we determine to seek for grace to trust him, that we yield ourselves implicitly to work with him, that we seek in faith to expect great things from him. There are many wildernesses for the body and the soul; many needs as deep as that of bread; many times when we are far

from all ordinary supplies ; but amid them all, there is now, as ever, but the one Jesus, who, as we survey famishing multitudes, and barren places, can answer the momentous question, "From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?"





X.

For.

"For they considered not the miracle of the loaves." — MARK vi. 52.

BENEATH all facts and actions there lie certain principles. We look at these facts and actions as they present themselves to our outward eyes ; we seldom trouble ourselves as to the motives or principles which have given them birth. And when we do inquire into these motives and principles, we are likely enough to make a mistake ; for God only can read the secrets of the heart of man.

The philosophic historian is expected, not only to tell us that certain events occurred, but also to trace them to their origin, and tell how it was they were brought about ; the skilful physician is expected, not only to discern the marks of disease, but also to trace it to its source, and tell us what functions are deranged ; but, in arguing from the seen and known to the unseen and the unknown, how often, how grievously do they err. A time, however, is coming when there shall be a great hinging together of

causes and effects, of motives and actions, and when no mistake shall be made. That time is the judgment day. Then it shall be seen, not only *what* men did, but *why* they did it. The word "For" shall then come out in all its mighty power, and very strange will be the revelations which it will make.

The subject, however, to which we must now direct our attention, refers, not so much to the future as the present. Let us gather up some of the teachings which this word "For" has for ourselves in our present spiritual life.

The Lord Jesus Christ had just performed a very great miracle, feeding five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes, and doing this so abundantly that twelve baskets full remained. Immediately after the working of this miracle, he sends his disciples away into a ship to the other side of the lake, and he himself departs into a mountain, alone, to pray. A storm sweeps down upon the lake, the disciples toil in rowing, and then Jesus comes to them walking upon the sea. They think it is a spirit, and cry out; and then Jesus says to them, "It is I, be not afraid." He goes up to them into the ship, and the wind ceases; and then we read, "They were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered." Why they are thus sore amazed beyond measure is shown us in this word "For," — "For they considered not the miracle of the loaves."

Now what do we learn for ourselves from these few short words? We learn first of all, that, —

There is a linking together of the events of our spiritual life.

A little reflection upon the history of our temporal lives will show us that there is no such thing as an isolated act; each event of life is hinged to something going before, and also to something coming after; our lives are not made up of events which are like grains of shot, each one complete in itself, and having no affinity with the other, but like drops of water, which mingle, and become one great whole.

Now, in our spiritual life also, events are linked together. The fact of having witnessed the feeding of the multitude ought to have had an effect upon the disciples' minds, which should have taken away their fear in the storm, and at any rate kept them from amazement at anything that Jesus did. The miracle of feeding had not produced its proper effect; and so the failure tells upon them now.

Now, we are not accustomed to take this connected view of spiritual events; we think that "so-and-so" is good, or "so-and-so" is bad, and there is an end of it. But that is not the case. If we resist a temptation to-day, we probably resist it better to-morrow; if we fail in learning a spiritual lesson to-day, we probably become more dull to-morrow; the great catastrophe itself will be found to have been preceded by a multitude of evils which linked themselves together to bring it on naturally, as it were at the last.

If any man harden himself against present callings of the Lord, and present warnings of conscience, he must by a spiritual necessity be the harder to rouse up by and by; these will soon be evils of the past, but by invisible links they will fix themselves to his present and his future. All evil must produce an effect.

How solemn, then, how important, becomes every teaching, every opportunity ; it may be the ruin of to-morrow will be traced to the dulness of to-day.

We learn, thus, that there is a linking together of the events of our spiritual life, and, also, that *failure in one point is not isolated* ; that it cannot be limited to that one point. Before we pass from this part of our subject, we would just observe that this is the case, even though at the time it is not perceived.

It often happens that we think no harm is done because we cannot see what the harm is ; there is nothing gross to strike the eye, and, therefore, all appears quite right. Now, who, save the All-seeing One, could have brought any charge against the disciples in connection with the miracle which had just been wrought ? They distributed the food at the Lord's command ; they no doubt were greatly delighted at the display which he had given of his power ; no evil appeared at the moment, but it comes out afterward. They looked at this miracle only on the surface ; they did not go down more than skin-deep into it ; they did not " consider " it, and hence, a divine hand traces their failure on the lake. The seeds of disease often lie a long time slumbering in the frame unperceived by any human eye ; but when the time of opportunity comes, they link themselves to perhaps a chill or a fog or the evening dew or something else, and so the patient dies. Thus was it with the disciples. The want of understanding Christ's character, as he appeared multiplying the bread, brought about failure in understanding

him as he manifested himself upon the lake ; and so they failed.

But now let us turn to the subject of "CONSIDERATION." The charge brought against the disciples here is, that "*they considered not.*" The wonderful miracle which Jesus wrought was not intended merely to excite their wonder ; it was calculated to give deep teaching, provided only it were used aright. Doubtless, but very few of the five thousand who partook of the Lord's bounty ever thought much about it afterwards ; their momentary need was satisfied, and that was enough for them. But it should not have been thus with the disciples ; they, at least, should have pondered the dealings of the One whose every act and word they knew to be of the deepest moment.

Now, God intends us to consider. There is a large portion of our spiritual education which is to be acquired by consideration. God deals with us as beings who have reasoning and thinking powers ; and he gives us, very often, the bare materials of thought, and then leaves us to deduce from them the great lesson which they can teach. We are responsible for reading facts, as well as for reading precepts. This our Lord himself plainly shows us in the rebuke which he administers to his disciples in Matt. xvi. He tells them there, to "take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread, which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith !

why reason ye among yourselves because ye have brought no bread ? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up ? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up ? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." It seems as though our Lord had expected them henceforth not to fear for bread, when they saw how he both *would* and *could* supply their earthly need. Believers are often guilty in this particular : they receive certain mercies, they enjoy them, they thank God for them, perhaps they distinctly recognize a wonderful outstretching of his hand for them ; but there the matter ends ; they *consider* not about it. We may be sure, God meant us to consider, — to use these facts when other circumstances arise on which they can be brought to bear. Often a past dealing will throw a bright light upon a present one. When Jesus walked upon the sea, and stilled the violence of the winds and waves, the disciples *need* not have been so much amazed ; they might have understood it all, if they had said to themselves, " This is He who but a little while ago multiplied the loaves." How much should we be able to go through, if we *considered* how much we have already been brought through ! How trustful should we be of God's goodness, if we *considered* how much of it we have already

had! The argument would be the argument of facts; God would get glory, and we should get peace.

This "consideration" is very suitable to us in our present condition. Here we are, amid all sorts of perplexities, encompassed with dangers and trials, with many circumstances continually occurring which it is impossible for us to explain according to appearances; what have we to fall back upon but this "consideration"? The past will often afford the key to the present, just as the present is destined to afford a key to the future. God is greatly honored when we read, and understand, and act upon the manifestations which he has given of himself.

And let us add a word upon *what kind this "consideration" should be*. It must be sanctified consideration. We must read God's dealings by a mind under the influence of his own grace, or else we shall misinterpret them, or not draw from them their power.

Very much evil may be traced to a lack of "consideration."

This excessive amazement of the disciples was not honoring to their Lord; the belief that as a matter of course he could walk upon the waters, and could still the storm, would have been honoring indeed.

And as to us, do we not dishonor God, when we feel as though his character were changed towards us? when we do not consider what he was, and ask ourselves why should he not still be the same? Do we not call him to deal upon our dull natures with

stripes, because we will not apply ourselves to learn in any finer way? Do we not present ourselves to the world, as really knowing little of our God, after all the long teaching which we have experienced at his hands? The giddy, unthinking Christian, who recognizes God's dealings as they arise, but never turns them to after use, is like a man with so much capital in a bank, but it bears him no interest, and he has forgotten all about it, he is so perplexed and stupified in his hour of need. Hence we see the great importance of reflecting upon circumstances as they arise; that the lessons which they are calculated to teach may be engraven on our minds, even though the facts themselves may be forgotten. The little circumstances of life, with which frequently the most important teaching is connected, from their very littleness, often slip from our memories; but if we have reflected upon them at the time; if, in a word, we have spiritualized our daily life, then, in this power of acquired habit, — the habit of seeing God in all, — we can act with understanding and with power when subsequent emergencies arise. Habit acts instinctively in matters of daily temporal life; it acts in the same way in matters of the spiritual life. Long after circumstances have faded from our memories, the lessons which they have taught may be acting with immense force. The experience remains, though the little facts by which it was attained are forgotten.

Observe, also, *how soon Jesus tried whether these disciples had learned a lesson.* The word "For" shows us that they ought to have done so; now comes the trial as to whether this was the case. So

it is with us. Every pupil in God's school has his lessons heard him from time to time. If the Great Teacher sets us a lesson, he will examine us, and see whether we have learned it or not. The disciples were examined *about the loaves on the lake*.

And let us remember that God's people are almost always examined by circumstances. He makes his scholars not only tell the rule, but also work out the sum. In circumstances he shows us himself, and in circumstances asks us whether we have learned about himself.

The one great point which is brought before us here is *consideration*; and that is the great lesson that we should learn from this word "For."

Let us ponder over the dealings of God with us whether they be dispensations of brightness or of gloom. Surely we should attend when he speaks; and we do not attend when we just listen at the moment, but think the matter over no more.

Let us remember, upon how common a material — even "bread" — our Lord taught a lesson of which he seems to have expected the results in the storm, and learn, that, in the commonest things of daily life, we ourselves are to be taught.

It may be that we say, "But Jesus did something wonderful with the bread;" and he does just as much that is wonderful in the commonest experiences of the poorest of his people. There are hundreds of occurrences in daily life, full of the materials for holy thought, if only we will use them as God designed that we should, and "consider."

And let all this be turned to practical account.

When our hour of suffering comes, and we think, "how shall I ever get through this?" let us consider, How much we have been already brought through; consider how God has been, and then believe that he also will be, our friend. Let not past providences and mercies be lost upon us. When God helped us in the past, it was, amongst other reasons, to teach us to honor him by trust in the future. May our common daily-bread mercies be our teachers,—daily bread, which is continued to us by much more wonderful ways than we think. May it never be said of us, "For they remembered not the miracle of the loaves."



APPENDIX A.

It may prove helpful to us if we look at the steadfastness and constancy, yes, and at the suffering, with which one of God's people thus faithfully went, not one, but many days, bearing the fire and knife. We allude to the sufferings of Henry Martyn before his actually setting out on his missionary career. Well says his biographer, speaking of his final determination to make this the great object of his life, "Nor let it be conceived that he could adopt this resolution without the severest conflict in his mind; for he was endued with the truest sensibility of heart, and was susceptible of the warmest and tenderest attachments. No one could exceed him in love for his country, or in affection for his friends; and few could surpass him in an exquisite relish for the various and refined enjoyments of a social and literary life. How then could it fail of being a moment of extreme anguish when he came to the deliberate resolution of leaving forever all he held dear on earth?" He made the resolution, and then "from that time he stood prepared, with a childlike simplicity of spirit and an unshaken constancy of soul, to go to any part of the world whither it might be deemed expedient to send him."

The resolution cost much, just as, no doubt, the resolution to start for Horeb must have cost Abraham much. But when we read of Henry Martyn's subsequent trials of spirit we know not to which to give the pre-eminence of trial: the day on which the resolution was made, or the period which had to intervene before he arrived at his Horeb, the place of trial which God showed him.

In a letter to his youngest sister he says, "The dejection I sometimes labor under seems not to arise from doubts of my acceptance with God, though it tends to produce them, nor from desponding views of my own backwardness in the divine life, for I am more prone to self-dependence and conceit, but from the prospect of the difficulties I have to encounter in the whole of my future life. The thought that I might be unceasingly employed in the same kind of work amongst poor ignorant people is what my proud spirit revolts at. To be obliged to submit to a thousand uncomfortable things that must happen to me, whether as a minister or a missionary, is what the flesh cannot endure." "In all my past life," says he in his diary, "I have fixed on some desirable ends, at different distances, the attainment of which was to furnish me with happiness. But now in seasons of unbelief nothing seems to lie before me but one vast, uninteresting wilderness, and heaven appearing dimly at the end. Oh, how does this show the necessity of living by faith!"

Then comes a record of trouble from the actual testimony of one who had just been engaged in the very work on which he was about to start. "I was under some disquiet at the prospect of my future work, encompassed, as it appeared, with difficulties; but I trusted I was under the guidance of infinite wisdom, and on that I could trust. Mr. Johnson, who had returned from a mission, observed that the crosses to be endured were far greater than could be conceived; but 'none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I might finish my course with joy.' I had some disheartening thoughts at night, on the prospect of being stripped of every earthly comfort; but who is it that maketh my comforts to be a source of enjoyment? Cannot the same hand make cold

and hunger and nakedness and peril to be a train of ministering angels, conducting me to glory? O my soul, compare thyself with St Paul, and with the example and precepts of the Lord Jesus Christ! Was it not his meat and drink to do the will of his Heavenly Father?" Then again, "I had distressing thoughts about the little prospect of happiness in my future life." There was one to whom his heart was especially knit, — dear to him as Isaac was to Abraham, — and we meet with this short notice of her in his journal. And who can tell how much it cost him to pen these words? "Parted forever with Lydia in this life, with a sort of uncertain pain which I knew would increase to greater violence." Henry Martyn's biographer does not give us the exact words in which the violence of that pain was doubtless chronicled; but he says, "These forebodings were but too soon realized. On the evening of that day, and for many succeeding days, his mental agony was extreme; yet he could speak to God as one who knew the great conflict within him. He was convinced that as God willed his happiness, he was providing for it eventually by that bitter separation; he resolved through grace to be his, though it should be through much tribulation; he experienced sweetly and solemnly the excellence of serving him faithfully, and of following Christ and his apostles," etc. Then comes the parting with his sister, when "they parted as if to meet no more, and, overwhelmed with inexpressible grief, could find no consolation but in mutually commending each other to the grace of God in prayer."

And now the former trouble crops up again with inward agony, — a trouble that need not be, if he, unlike Abraham, will refuse to go whither the Lord had sent him. "Oh, the subtilty of the devil, and the deceitfulness of this corrupted heart! How has an idol been imperceptibly

raised up in it! Something fell from Dr. F—— this evening against my marriage, which struck me so forcibly, though there was nothing particular in it, that I began to see I should finally give up all thoughts about it. But how great the conflict! I could not believe it had such hold on my affections. Before this, I had been writing in tolerable tranquillity, and walked out in the enjoyment of a resigned mind, ever rejoicing for the most part in God, and dined at Mr. Cecil's, where the arguments I heard were all in favor of the flesh; and so I was pleased. But Dr. Fearon's words gave a new turn to my thoughts, and the tumult showed me the true state of my heart. How miserable did life appear without the hope of Lydia! Oh, how has the discussion of the subject opened all my wounds afresh! I have not felt such heart-rending pain since I parted with her in Cornwall. But the Lord brought me to consider the folly and the wickedness of all this. Shall I hesitate to keep my days in constant solitude, who am but a brand plucked from the burning? I could not help saying, Go, Hindoos, go on in your misery! Let Satan still reign over you; for he that was appointed to labor among you is consulting his ease. No, thought I, hell and earth shall never keep me back from my work; I am cast down, but not destroyed. I began to consider, Why am I so uneasy? 'Cast thy care upon Him, for he careth for you.' 'In everything by prayer,' etc. These promises were graciously fulfilled before long to me." "My heart," he says, "was sometimes ready to break with agony, at its being torn from its dearest idol; and at other times I was visited by a few moments of sublime and enraptured joy. Such is the conflict. Why have my friends mentioned this subject? It has torn open all my wounds, and I am again bleeding. With all my honors and knowledge, the smiles and approbation of men, the health and

prosperity that have fallen to my lot, together with that freedom from doubts and fears with which I was formerly visited, how much have I gone through in the last two or three years to bring my mind to be willing to do the will of God, when it should be revealed ! My heart is pained within me, and my bodily frame suffers from it."

Coming suddenly upon the ship which was to bear him away from his native land, he says, "The sudden sight of water and of the ship affected me almost to tears. My emotions were mixed — partly of joy, and partly of trembling apprehensions of my being now so soon to go away." A few days afterwards he writes, "Memory has been at work to unnerve my soul ; but reason and honor and love to Christ shall prevail. Amen. God help me !"

God's interference in supporting him continually appeared, he said, to him to be *like a miracle*. In his journal of June 16, he says, "Shed tears at night, at the thought of my departure, and the roaring sea that would soon be rolling between me and all that is dear to me upon earth. June 23. On the subject of the mission, I seemed assisted to unfold my heart unto the Lord, and to pray for his mighty protection in the *fiery trial* which is about to try me."

On the 8th of July, Henry Martyn left London for Portsmouth, and "such was the acuteness of his feelings during this journey, that he fainted and fell into a convulsive fit at the inn at which he slept on the road ; a painful intimation, to those friends who were with him, of the poignancy of that grief which he endeavored as much as possible to repress and conceal."

At length the time came for this tried but determined man to sail. And now we should have said, Surely, the bitterness of the conflict has passed. But, no ; the faith in which he had commenced was to receive another trial,

and that the more severe, because wholly unexpected. The vessel in which he is put in most unexpectedly at Falmouth; he is once again in the midst of his well-loved scenes; he enjoys once more the company of the one he loved best on earth; he is agitated at the singularity of God's providence in thus leading him once more into the midst of his friends. "May the Lord," said he, "glorify himself in this and every other dispensation." Again there come records of "acute mental misery," "extreme anguish," and when the land had faded from his view, his last notice of it was one of anguish. "England had disappeared, and with it all my peace. The pains of memory were all I felt. Would I go back? Oh, no! but how can I be supported?" Blessed be God that, despite the keenness of this anguish, he could "realize the realms of glory," and "earthly things died away in insignificance."

APPENDIX B.

A WONDERFUL instance of this faith, recognizing unmurmuringly the right of God to act, and the exhibition of his wisdom and goodness in deep and varied trials, will be found in the following extract from the life of Madame Guyon. Dim and confused as was her view of the true standing of the believer in Christ, how much does her resignation, her faith, shame the impatience and distrust of many a tried but fretful child of God.

"The first thing he did was to smite her beauty with that dreadful scourge the small pox. The summer was over; her ear no longer listened to the waters of the Loire; the festivities of St Cloud and Paris had passed away. On the 4th of October, 1670, the blow came upon

her like lightening from heaven. This dreadful disease was not then shorn of its terrors by that merciful Providence which directed the philosophic mind of Jenner in the discovery of its wonderful preventive. And she was thus smitten when she was a little more than twenty-two years of age. When it was discovered that the hand of the Lord was thus upon her, her friends exhibited great emotion. They came around her bedside, and, almost forgetting that her life was in danger, deplored in feeling language the mysterious and fatal attack which was thus made upon charms which had been so much celebrated.

"Before I fell under this disease," she says, "I resembled those animals, destined for slaughter, which on certain days they adorn with greens and flowers, and bring in pomp into the city before they kill them. My whole body looked like that of a leper. All who saw me said they had never seen such a shocking spectacle. But the devastation without was counterbalanced by peace within. My soul was kept in a state of contentment greater than can be expressed. Reminded continually of one of the causes of my religious trials and falls, I indulged the hope of regaining my inward liberty by the loss of that outward beauty which had been my grief. This view of my condition rendered my soul so well satisfied that it would not have exchanged its condition for that of the most happy prince in the world.

"Every one thought I should be inconsolable. Several of my friends came around me, and gave utterance to their regret and sympathy in view of my sad condition. As I lay in my bed, suffering the total deprivation of that which had been a snare to my pride, I experienced a joy unspeakable. I praised God in profound silence. None ever heard any complaints from me, either of my pains or of

the loss which I sustained. *Thankfully I received everything as from God's hand*; and I did not hesitate to say to those who expressed their regret and sympathy, that I rejoiced at that in which they found so much cause of lamentation.

"When I had so far recovered as to be able to sit up in my bed, I ordered a mirror to be brought, and indulged my curiosity so far as to view myself in it. I was no longer what I was once. It was then that I *saw that my Heavenly Father had not been unfaithful in his work*, but had ordered the sacrifice in all its reality. Some persons sent me a sort of pomatum, which they said would have the effect of filling up the hollows of the small pox, and restoring my complexion. I had myself seen wonderful effects of it upon others; and the first impulse of my mind was to test its merits in my own case. But God, jealous of his work, would not suffer it. The inward voice spoke. There was something in my heart which said, '*If I would have had thee fair, I would have left thee as thou wert.*'

"Fearful of offending God, by setting myself against the designs of his providence, I was obliged to lay aside the remedies which were brought me. I was under the necessity of going into the open air, which made the hollows of my face worse. As soon as I was able, I did not hesitate to go into the streets and places where I had been accustomed to go previously, in order that my humiliation might triumph in the very places where my unholy pride had been exalted.

"During these afflictions, the trials in connection with my husband's family continued. At the commencement of my sickness, I was so much neglected by my mother-in-law, that I was on the point of dying for want of succor. Such was the state of my husband's health at this time,

that I was necessarily left, in a great degree, to her care. She would not allow any physician but her own to prescribe for me ; and yet, she did not send for him for some time, although he was within a day's journey of us. He came at last, when I had providentially received some assistance from another source, and when he could be of but little service to me. In this extremity, I opened not my mouth to request any human succor. I looked for life or death from the hand of God without testifying the least uneasiness at so strange a course of conduct. The peace I enjoyed within, on account of that perfect resignation in which God kept me by his grace, was so great that it made me forget myself in the midst of such violent maladies and pressing dangers.

“ And if it was thus in my sickness, it could not well be expected that my mother-in-law would exhibit any more favorable dispositions after my recovery. She did not cease at all in her unkind efforts to alienate my husband's affections from me. And now, as God had smitten and taken away whatever there was of beauty in my countenance, he seemed to be more susceptible than ever of any unfavorable impressions. In consequence, the persons who spoke to him to my disadvantage, finding themselves more listened to than formerly, repeated their attacks upon me more frequently and more boldly. Others changed ; but God did not change. Thou only, O my God, didst remain the same. Thou didst smite me without, but didst not cease to bless me within. In augmenting my exterior crosses, thou didst not cease to increase my inward graces and happiness.

“ But the work of God was not yet accomplished. If he had smitten and demolished one dear idol, there were others which remained. God had given her two sons. The eldest was in the sixth year, the youngest in the

fourth year, of his age. She loved them both; but one was especially the son of her affections. The eldest she loved with some alternations of feeling, and in deep sorrow. The same causes which operated to disturb and alienate her husband's affections had their influence here. The second son was not thus injured. In the favorable opening of his first affections and intellect, he filled the measure of a mother's fondness and hopes. Her heart was fixed upon him. But God, who knew on which side danger lay, took her Jacob, and left her Esau."

He was seized with the same terrible disease. "This blow," she says, "struck me to the heart. I was overwhelmed; but God gave me strength in my weakness. I loved my young boy tenderly; but though I was greatly afflicted at his death, I saw the hand of the Lord so clearly that I shed no tears. I offered him up to God, and said, in the language of Job, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be his name!'"

After that her father died, then her daughter.

"Another affliction was near at hand. He who gives himself to God, to experience under his hand the transformations of sanctifying grace, must be willing to give up all objects, however dear they may be, which he does not hold in strict subordination to the claims of divine love, and which he does not love in and for God alone. The sanctification of the heart, in the strict and full sense of the term, is inconsistent with a divided and wandering affection. A misplaced love, whether it be wrong in its degree or object, is as really, though apparently not as odiously, sinful as a misplaced hatred."

"She had a daughter, an *only* daughter, — young, it is true, only three years of age, or but a little more than three years of age, — and yet, in her own language, '*as dearly beloved as she was truly beautiful.*' 'This little

daughter,' says the mother, 'had great beauty of person; and the graces of the body were equalled by those of the mind; so that a person must have been insensible, both to beauty and to merit, not to have loved her. Young as she was, she had a perception of religious things, and seems to have loved God in an extraordinary manner. Often I found her in some retired place, in some corner praying. It was her habit, whenever she saw me at prayer, to come and join with me; and, if at any time she discovered that I had been praying without her, feeling that something was lost, she would weep bitterly, and exclaim in her sorrow, "Ah, mother, you pray, but I do not pray." When we were alone, if she saw my eyes closed, as would naturally be the case in my seasons of inward recollection, she would whisper, "Are you asleep?" and then would cry out, "Ah, no! you are praying to our dear Jesus;" and, dropping on her knees before me, she would begin to pray too.

"So strongly did she express her desire and determination to give herself to the Lord, and to be one with him in spirit, that it gave occasion for reproof on the part of her grandmother; but still she could not be prevailed upon to alter her expressions. She was very dutiful; many were her endearments; and she was innocent and modest as a little angel. Her father doted on her. To her mother she was endeared much more by the qualities of her heart, than by those of her beautiful person. I looked upon her as my great, and almost my only, consolation on earth; for she had as much affection for me as her surviving brother, who had been subjected to the most unhappy influences, had aversion and contempt. She died of an unseasonable bleeding. But what shall I say, — she died by the hands of Him who was pleased to strip me of all.'"

— *Life of Madame Guyon.*

APPENDIX C.

"ON the 8th of November the first three boys came ; by the end of December there were twelve. They varied in ages from five years up to eighteen ; their variations in vice were not so great, for they were uniformly bad. Eight of them were illegitimate ; four were under the influence of criminal and drunken parents ; one lad of twelve was known to the police by ninety-two thefts ; one had escaped from prison ; one had sinned until he had become imbecile. They were all thoroughly wild ; lying and stealing were their second nature. They were poor street wanderers, such as may be seen in London in the dreary winter nights, crouching in doorways and under bridges ; little heaps of rags, with perhaps bright, hungry eyes that sparkle on you in a kind of savage fear. They used to sleep on piles of stones, or on steps ; 'only,' said one, who slept in empty carts, 'the stars awoke me in winter, for they looked down on me so clear and white.' There was a shameless, false, little beggar among them ; a poor thing deserted by his mother, and who had risen to be the leader of all the street boys in the neighborhood, and a notorious plague. There was a boy who had been treated like a beast, and naturally lived like a beast. His so-called adopted parents had bought him for £13 ; the woman was an idiot, the man a coarse drunkard ; and under them he lived till he was eighteen. No wonder he came shy, full of distrust, naked within and without. A boy of twelve declared positively that he believed in no God, much less a Saviour, no resurrection, no judgment. He had once laid violent hands on himself, and, when angry, he threatened that he would run himself through with a knife. Frightful fits of passion seized upon him, culminating in one which lasted twelve hours, and during

which four men could scarcely hold him. Before he came, he used to be chained at such times. These made up the household of that loving son and mother. Others followed like them, — notorious pickpockets, vagabonds, who from vagabondage could not speak fluently, young house-breakers. They had learned to sleep on the ice, though, as for other learning, they could scarcely count two. They could eat raw meat, potato-peel, swine's drink, maybugs, tallow for greasing shoes, — this last with peculiar relish. Two of them were from a kind of wild beast den, — a cellar inhabited by their grandmother, and where thieves and beggars of every sort came to drink brandy, and pass the night in the vilest orgies. A girl of thirteen had every conceivable bad quality. A boy of the same age cudgelled his mother (helpless by a sprained hand) and grandmother, beat the neighbor's children, came home at night drunk and smoking cigars, stole from his mother what he could lay his hands on, and was three times put in prison. There was a girl of fourteen, whose mother reported that she was a very good child, only that she stole eagerly, and lied as much as she stole; and she would steal and lie though you might strike her dead. The mother of one boy held the lies she told for her children as a special merit, and indeed a proof of extraordinary virtue; the boy himself drank, and kicked his mother. A child of nine is described as lying, stealing, abusing his father, scratching, biting, kicking, swearing. 'A girl of ten' — it is the poor mother's testimony — 'will look in your face like an innocent Christian, and lie more than ten grown people. She breaks open everything, and has been beaten half dead.' And here is the history of a lad of sixteen. He stole one hundred marks from his father; was apprenticed in a shop; stole; was hunted away; apprenticed to a cigarmaker; stole again, and was again

hunted out; went to service; broke into the savings'-box of his master's children; worked at day labor; stole from his comrades; was arrested; returned to his father.

"The air they breathed was tainted; they were habituated to the absence of common morality and decency; they were checked by the rudest and most barbarous punishments, and grew up to be more like beasts than men. 'Little one,' said a mother one day, 'what makes you tell lies? You know you don't *need* to do it now.' Another mother used to seize her boy by the feet, sit down on a chair, and pummel the ground with his head; 'but even that, she added, with some surprise, 'did him no good, and so I think your Rough-House measures will scarcely succeed.' One made his entry by throwing down all the little boys he could find, rushing into the stalls, driving out the swine with a halloo, and hunting them over the garden beds with an axe in one hand and a spade in the other. They were brought up familiar with the scenes of the Hamburg dancing-booths, the joys of street theatres, filthy romances, the most obscene ballads, travesties of the purest hymns, clever parodies of the Bible; there could scarcely be a more corrupt atmosphere than that in which they lived. Some of them had to be forbidden to speak a word for weeks after their entrance. They were mostly hopeless young incorrigibles, given up by every one who had tried a hand upon them."

It is cheering and helpful to those who will venture upon hard work, and apparently hopeless work, for the Lord that we have some account of how these unpromising subjects turned out. "These are the fruits of it in the first twelve. They have eaten their bread in honor; they have their children, their Christian household life. Four of them settled in Hamburg; four settled elsewhere; two went seafaring. Of those three who have been spe

cially mentioned, the first became a help and stay of the house; the second a God-fearing, thorough man, with few capabilities but with strong practical sense and an entire trustworthiness; the third, of whom it is told — and it is characteristic of that retarded childhood that marks the whole class — the child's freshness and simplicity, that have been withered by poverty and cruelty and crime, pushing out, often grotesquely, in the grown-up man, when he is brought under loving and humanizing influence — that when digging in the garden he used to vex himself, with such questions as whether he could dig on till he came out at the other side, and what the world would look like there, — who was the terror of his mother and sister, and of the other boys, and even a terror to himself, — soon drew everybody's heart, and grew up a gentle and forgiving, but brave, strong, determined man."

Nor is the blessing limited to these twelve. "A glance," says Wichern, "round the circle of those who were children of the house, carries us into every region of the world, even into the heart of Australia. We find them again in every grade and social position: one is a clergyman, another is a student of theology, and another is a student of law; others are, or were, teaching. We find among them officers in our German armies, agriculturists, merchants in Germany, and, at least, in two other European countries; partners in honorable firms; they are presidents of industrial institutions, skilful landscape gardeners, lithographists, and xylographists, artisans scattered through many towns, wandering apprentices in every conceivable craft. One is a sea-captain, some are pilots, others sailors who have taken one voyage after another and seen all the seas of the world. They are colonists in America and Australia; and both there and at home there are happy fathers among them, training their

children righteously, and building up their family life after the fashion they have lived here. And there are men servants and women servants and day laborers; and besides those who are better off there are also the poorer, and such as are burdened by care either with or without their own fault. Besides, a considerable number have died at home and abroad (very many in proportion of its earlier girls), and some of those who went out to sea have never returned, probably many have found a sea grave; some have disappeared; some suddenly turn up after long years have passed. I recall one who left this house twenty years ago, and of whom I heard nothing for the last ten years, until he has now notified himself as a well-doing master artisan, and a happy father in a distant town." — *Praying and Working* — *Immanuel Wichern*, page 129, etc.

Let us take another instance from Immanuel Wichern's "Rough-House" experience.

"On their first Christmas, a boy ran off. He was met unexpectedly in the Christmas fair, and, though in evident anxiety, did not hesitate to return. When he arrived, the rest were singing their Christmas hymns around the mother. There was a pause, and a shrinking from him; and at length the elder boys proposed that he should be punished. They retired to consider what the punishment should be, and after a quarter of an hour suggested some punishments that were very fitting, but very severe. One then stood out, and begged forgiveness; and with a sudden change they all joined, and reached the culprit their hands. And when shortly after, he found himself sent, as before, a mile off for milk, and without the slightest want of confidence, the change was complete. He went afterwards on the most distant errands, nor did he ever abuse his freedom again. For some time, as often as

he heard the Christmas hymns, the tears would start into his eyes ; and when, about the next Christmas, he was sent with a considerable sum for meal, he came forward, grasped Wichern by the hand, and said in a choked voice, ‘I never can forget that you trusted me last Christmas.’ That trust was met by trust ; and a feeling of honor was roused, and kept from being selfish by being joined to the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake. ‘I would have run away,’ said a Meltray boy, ‘for nothing could be easier, and I wanted to go ; but when I thought that our directors trusted me, I could not bring myself to do it.’”



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